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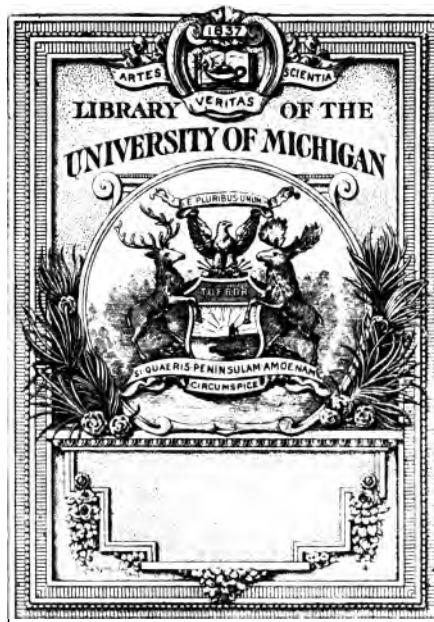
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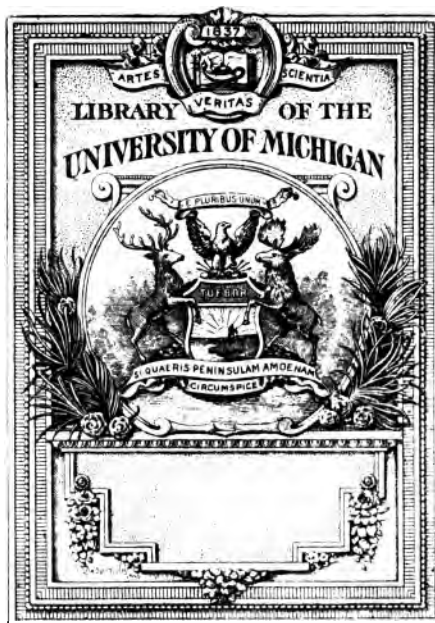
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GERFAUT

A NOVEL

BY

CHARLES de BERNARD

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

A. A. PAGE

ILLUSTRATED WITH EIGHT HALF-TONES FROM THE ORIGINAL
ETCHINGS



CHICAGO
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GERFAUT

CHAPTER I

During the first days of the month of September 1832, a young man of about thirty years of age, was walking through one of the valleys in Lorraine originating in the Vosges mountains. A little river, which after a few leagues course, flows into the Moselle, watered this wild basin shut in between two parallel lines of mountains. The hills in the south became gradually lower and finally dwindled away into the plain. Alongside the plateau, arranged in amphitheatres, large square fields stripped of their harvest lay, here and there, in the primitive forest; in other places, venerable oaks and elms had been dethroned to give place to plantations of cherry trees, whose symmetrical rows promised an abundant harvest. This contest of nature with industry is to be found everywhere but is still more pronounced in mountainous countries. The scene changed, however, as one penetrated farther, and little by little the influence of the soil gained ascendancy. According as the hills grew nearer together, enclosing the valley in a closer embrace, the clearings gave way to the natural obduracy of the soil. A little farther on they disappeared entirely. At the foot of one of the bluffs which bordered with its granite bands the highest plateau of the mountain, the forest rolled victoriously down to

the banks of the river. Sometimes there were patches of forest, like solid battalions of infantry; sometimes solitary trees appeared as if distributed by chance upon the grassy slopes, or scaling the summit of the steepest rocks like a body of bold sharp-shooters. A little, unfrequented road, if one can judge from the scarcity of tracks, ran alongside the banks of the stream climbing up and down hills; overcoming every obstacle, it stretched out in almost a straight line. One might compare it to those strong characters who mark out a course in life and imperturbably follow it. The river, on the contrary, like those docile and compliant minds who bend to agreeable emergencies, described, every few moments, graceful curves, obeying thus the caprices of the soil which served as its bed.

At a first glance, the young man who was walking alone in the midst of this picturesque country seemed to have nothing remarkable in his dress; a straw hat, a blue blouse and linen trousers composed his costume. It would have been very natural to have taken him for an Alsatian peasant returning to his village though the Vosges' rough pathways; but a more attentive glance quickly dispelled this conjecture. There is something in the way in which a person wears the plainest costume which betrays the real man, no matter how he may be clothed. Thus, nothing could be more modest than this traveler's blouse, but the absence on collar and sleeves of the arabesques in white or red thread, the pride of all village dandies, was sufficient for one to realize that this was not a fancy costume. His expressive, but not exactly handsome, face was dark, it is true, but it did not look as if wind or sun had contributed to its complexion; it seemed rather to

have lost by a sedentary life something of the southern carnation, which had ended by blending these warmer tints into a dead uniform pallor. Finally if, as one may suppose after different diagnoses, this person had the slightest desire to play the role of Tyrcis or Amintas, his white hand, as carefully cared for as a pretty woman's, would have been sufficient to betray him. It was evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing! It was the lion's ears which pierce the ass' skin this time.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the sky which had been overcast all the morning had assumed, within a few moments, a more somber aspect; large clouds were rapidly moving from south to north, rolled one over the other by an ominous wind. So the traveler, who had just entered the wildest part of the valley, seemed very little disposed to admire its fine vegetation and romantic sites. Impatient to reach the end of his journey or fearing the approaching storm, he quickened his steps; but this pace was not of long duration. At the end of a few moments, after having crossed a small clearing, he found himself at the entrance of a lawn where the road divided into two directions, one continuing to skirt the riverbanks, the other, broader and better built, turning to the left into a winding ravine.

Which of these two roads should he follow? He did not know. The profound solitude of the place made him fear that he might not meet anyone who could direct him, when the sound of a psalm vigorously chanted reached his ears from the distance. Soon it became more distinct and he recognized the words *In exitu Israel de Egypto*, sung at the top of

the lungs by a voice so shrill that it would have irritated the larynx of all the sopranos at the "Opera." Its vibrating but sharp tone resounded so clearly in the dead silence of the forest that a number of verses were finished before the pious musician came in sight. At last a drove of cattle appeared through the trees which bordered the road on the left, walking with a slow, grave step; they were driven by a little shepherd of about nine or ten years of age, who interrupted his song from time to time to gather together the members of his flock with heavy blows from his whip, thus uniting temporal cares with those of a spiritual nature with a coolness which the most important personages might have envied him.

"Which of these roads leads to Bergenhiem?" called out the traveler when they were near enough to speak to each other.

"Bergenheim!" repeated the child taking off his cotton cap which was striped like a rainbow, and adding a few words in an unintelligible gallo-germanique patois.

"You are not French then?" asked the stranger in a disappointed tone.

The shepherd raised his head proudly and replied:
"I am Alsatian, not French!"

The young man smiled at this trait of local patriotism so common then in the beautiful province by the Rhine; then he thought that pantomime might be necessary, so he pointed with his finger first at one road then at the other:

"There or there, Bergenheim?" asked he.

The child, in his turn, pointed silently with the tip of his whip to the banks of the river, designating, at

some distance on the other side, a thicket of woods behind which a slight column of smoke was rising.

"The dickens!" murmured the stranger, "it seems that I have gone astray; if the chateau is on the other side where can I establish my ambuscade?"

The shepherd seemed to understand the traveler's embarrassment. Gazing at him with his intelligent blue eyes, he traced, with the tip of his toes in the middle of the road, a furrow across which he rounded his whip like the arch of a bridge; then he pointed a second time up the river.

"You are an honor to your country, young fellow," exclaimed the stranger; "there is the material in you to make one of Cooper's redskins." As he said these words he threw a piece of money into the child's cap and walked rapidly away in the direction indicated.

The Alsatian stood motionless for a few moments with one hand in his blonde hair and his eyes fastened upon the piece of silver which shone like a star in the bottom of his cap; when the one whom he considered as a model of extraordinary generosity disappeared behind the trees, he gave vent to his joy by heavy blows from his whip upon the backs of the cattle, then he resumed his way singing in a still more triumphant tone: *Montes exultaverunt ut arietes* and jumping higher himself than all the hills and rams in the Bible.

The young man had not walked more than five minutes before he recognized the correctness of the directions he had received. The ground which he had passed over during this time was a prairie covered with clumps of low trees; it was easy to see by its disc shape that it had been formed by successive al-

luviums, at the expense of the other shore which had been incessantly worn away by the stream. This sort of flat, level peninsula was crossed in a straight line by the road which deviated from the river at the point where the two roads came together again, like the cross and string of a bow at its extremity. The trees becoming thinner revealed a perspective all the more wonderful as it was unexpected. While the eye followed the widening stream which disappeared in the depths of a mountainous gorge, a new prospect suddenly presented itself on the right upon the other shore. A second valley, smaller than the first and in a measure its vassal, formed an amphitheatre whose crest was bordered by a fringe of perpendicular rocks which were as white as dried bones. Under this crown, which rendered it almost inaccessible, the little valley was resplendent in its wealth of evergreen trees, oaks with their knotty branches and its fresh green turf. Taken as a whole, it was a foundation worthy of the picturesque edifice which met one's eye in the foreground and at which the traveler gazed with extreme interest.

At the junction of the two valleys stood an enormous building, half manorial, half monastic in appearance. The shore formed, at this point, for an extent of several hundred feet, a bluff whose edge plunged vertically into the river. The chateau and its out-buildings rested upon this solid base. The principal house was a large parallelogram of very old construction, but which had evidently been almost entirely rebuilt at the commencement of the sixteenth century. The stones, of greyish granite which abounds in the Vosges, were streaked with blue and violet veins, and gave the facade



a somber aspect increased by the scarcity of windows, some of which were *a la Paladio*, others almost as narrow as loop holes. An immense roof of red tile darkened by rain, projected several feet over the whole front, as is still to be seen in old cities in the North. Thanks to this excessive weather-board, the apartments upon the upper floor were shaded from the sun's rays like those persons who have weak eyes and who protect them from a strong light by wearing a green shade.

The view which this melancholy dwelling presented, from the place where the traveler had first seen it, was one which made it appear to the best advantage; it seemed, from this point, to come immediately out of the river, built as it was upon the very curb stone of the bluffs, at this place at least thirty feet high. This elevation added to that of the building effaced the disproportion of the roof and gave to the whole a most imposing appearance; it seemed as if the rocks were a part of the building to which it served as foundation, for the stones had ended by assuming the same color, and it would have been difficult to discover the junction of man's work and that of nature, had it not been outlined by a massive iron balcony running across the entire length of the first story, and from where one could enjoy the pleasure of line-fishing. Two round towers with pointed roofs stood at each corner of the facade and seemed to gaze with proud satisfaction at their own reflection in the water.

A long row of sycamore trees skirted the banks of the river, starting from the foot of the chateau, and formed the edge of a park which extended to the back of the double valley. A little wooden bridge connected

this sort of avenue with the road the traveler had just passed over; but the latter did not seem disposed to profit by this silent invitation to which large rain drops gave more emphasis. He was so absorbed in his meditation that, to arouse him, it needed the sound of a gruff voice behind him uttering these words:

"That is what I call an ugly castle! It is hardly as good as our common country houses around Marseilles."

The stranger turned quickly around and found himself face to face with a man wearing a grey cap and carrying his coat upon his shoulder, as workmen do in the South. He held in his hand a knotty stick which had been recently cut. The new-comer had a swarthy complexion, harsh features and deep set eyes which gave his face an ugly, false expression.

"I said an ugly castle," continued he. "However the cage is made for the bird."

"It seems then that you do not like its master?" said the traveler.

"The master!" repeated the workman seizing hold of his stick with a threatening air: "M.le baron de Bergenheim as they say! He is rich and a nobleman, and I am only a poor carpenter. Well then, if you stay here a few days, you will witness a comical ceremony; I will make this brigand repent."

"Brigand!" exclaimed the stranger in a surprised tone. "What has he done to you?"

"Yes, Brigand! you may tell him so from me. But by the way," continued the workman surveying his companion from head to foot with a searching, defiant air, "do you happen to be the carpenter who is coming from Strasbourg? In that case, I have a few words

to say to you. Lambernier does not allow any one to take the bread out of his mouth in that way; do you understand?"

The young man seemed very little moved by this declaration.

"I am not a carpenter," said he smiling, "and I have no wish for your work."

"Truly you do not look as if you had pushed a plane very often. It seems that in your business one does not spoil one's hands. You are a workman about as much as I am pope."

This remark made the one to whom it was addressed feel in as bad a humor as an author does when he finds a grammatical error in one of his books.

"So you work at the chateau then," said he finally, to change the conversation.

"For six months I have worked in that shanty," replied the workman; "I am the one who carved the new wood work and I will say, it is well done. Well, this great wild boar of a Bergenheim turned me out of the house yesterday as if I had been one of his dogs."

"He doubtless had his reasons."

"I tell you, I will crush him—Reasons! G— d— it! They told him I talked too often with his wife's maid and quarreled with the servants, a pack of idlers! Did he not forbid my putting my foot upon his land? I am upon his land now; let him come and chase me off, let him come, he will see how I will receive him. Do you see this stick? I have just cut it in his own woods to use it on himself!"

The young man no longer listened to the workman, his eyes were turned toward the castle whose slightest

details he studied, as if he hoped that in the end the stone would turn into glass and let him see the interior. If this curiosity had any other object than the architecture and form of the building it was not gratified. No human figure came to enliven this sad, lovely dwelling. All the windows were closed as if the house was uninhabited. The baying of dogs, probably imprisoned in their kennel, was the only sound which came to break the strange silence, and the distant thunder, with its dull rumbling repeated by the echoes, responded plaintively, and gave a lugubrious character to the scene.

"When one speaks of the devil he appears," said the workman suddenly, with an emotion which gave the lie to his recent bravado; "if you wish to see this devil incarnate of a Bergenheim, just turn your head. Good bye."

At these words, he leaped a ditch at the left of the road and disappeared in the bushes. The stranger also seemed to feel an impression very like that of Lambernier's as he saw a man on horseback advancing on a gallop. Instead of waiting for him, he darted into the field which descended to the river and hid behind a group of trees.

The baron, who was not more than thirty-three years of age, had one of those energetic handsome faces whose type seems to particularly belong to old military families. His bright blonde hair and clear blue eyes contrasted strongly with his ruddy complexion; his aspect was severe, but noble and imposing in spite of his negligent dress which showed that indifference to matters of personal attire which becomes habitual with country landlords. His tall figure was

beginning to grow stout, and that increased his athletic appearance. He sat very erect in his saddle, and from the way in which he straightened out his long legs against the sides of his beast one suspected that he could, if necesasry, repeat Marshall de Saxe's feats of skill. He suddenly stopped his horse at the very spot which the two men had just vacated and called out in a voice which would startle a regiment of cuirassiers:

"Here, Lambernier!"

The carpenter hesitated a moment, at this imperative call, between the fear which he could not overcome and shame at fleeing from a single man in the presence of a witness; finally this last feeling triumphed. He returned to the edge of the road without saying a word, when he stationed himself in an insolent way face to face with the baron, with his hat drawn down over his ears and grasping through precaution the knottystick which served him as a weapon.

"Lambernier," said the master of the castle in a severe tone of voice "your account was settled yesterday; was it not paid in full? Is there anything due you?"

"I ask nothing of you," replied the workman brusquely.

"In that case, why are you wandering about my place when I forbade you to?"

"I am upon the highway, nobody can prevent me from passing there."

"You are upon my land and you came out of my woods," replied the baron emphasizing his words with the firmness of a man who would permit no violation of his rights as a land-owner.

"The ground upon which I walk is mine," said the workman in his turn as he struck the end of his stick upon the ground as if to take possession. This gesture attracted Bergenheim's attention and his eyes flashed with a sudden light at the sight of the stick which Lambernier held.

"You scoundrel," he exclaimed, "you probably regard my trees also as your own. Where did you cut that stick?"

"Go and find out," said the workman accompanying his reply with a flourish of the stick.

The baron coolly dismounted, threw the bridle over his horse's neck, walked up to the workman who had taken the position of a practiced pugilist to receive him, and without giving him time to strike he disarmed him with one hand by a blow which would have been sufficient to uproot the beech rod before it was metamorphosed into a club; with the other hand he seized the man by the collar and gave him a shaking that it was as impossible to struggle against than if it had been caused by a steam engine. Obeying this irresistible force, in spite of his kicking, Lambernier described a dozen circles around his adversary, while the latter set these off with some of the hardest blows from green wood that ever chastised an insolent fellow. This gymnastic exercise ended by a slight of hand which, after having made the carpenter pirouette for the last time, sent him rolling head first into a ditch, the bottom of which, fortunately for him, was provided with a bed of soft mud. When his punishment was ended, Bergenheim remounted his horse as tranquilly as he had dismounted it and continued his way toward the chateau.

The young man, in the midst of the thicket where he was concealed, had lost no detail of this rural scene. He could not help having a feeling of admiration for this energetic representative of the feudal ages who, with no fear of any court of justice or other bourgeois inventions, had thus exerted over his own domains the summary justice in force in Eastern countries.

"France has thrashed Gaul," said he smiling to himself; "if all our men had this Bergenheim's iron fist many things determined upon to-day might be called in question. If I ever have the slightest difficulty with this Milon de Crotone, he may be sure I shall not choose pugilism as my mode of discussion."

The storm now burst forth in all its fury. A dark curtain covered the whole valley and the rain fell in torrents. The baron put spurs to his horse, crossed the bridge and entering the sycamore avenue, soon was out of sight. Without paying any attention to Lambernier, who was uttering imprecations at the bottom of the ditch into which he was sinking deeper and deeper, the stranger went to seek a less illusive shelter than the trees under which he had taken his position; but just at this moment his attention was attracted to one side of the castle. A window, or rather a glass door, just then opened upon the balcony and a young woman in a rose colored dressing gown appeared upon the dark facade. It would be impossible to imagine anything more fresh or charming than this apparition at such a moment. Leaning upon the balustrade, the young woman rested her face upon a hand which was as white as a lily, and her finger smoothed with a mechanical caress, the ringlets of chestnut hair

which lay upon her forehead, while her large brown eyes gazed into the depths of the clouds from which the lightning was flashing and with which they vied in brilliancy. A poet would have said it was Miranda evoked by the tempest.

The stranger parted the branches before him to get a better view; at the same instant he was blinded by a terrible flash which lighted the whole valley and was immediately followed by a terrific crash. When he opened his eyes, the chateau which he believed to be at the bottom of the river stood still upright, solemn and firm as before; but the lady in the rose colored morning gown had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

The appearance of the room, into which the lady had precipitately entered when startled by the thunder, corresponded with the edifice to which it belonged. It was a very large room, longer than it was wide, and lighted by three windows, the middle one of which opened from top to bottom like a door and led out upon the balcony. The woodwork and ceiling were in chestnut, which time had polished and a skilful hand had ornamented with a profusion of allegorical figure. The beauty of this work of art was almost entirely concealed by a very remarkable decoration which covered every side of the room and consisted of one of the most glorious collections of family portraits which a country chateau of the nineteenth century could offer.

The first of these potraits hung opposite the windows at the right of the entrance door and was that of a chevalier in full armor whose teeth gleamed from under his long mustache like those of an untamed cat. Beginning with this formidable figure which bore the date 1247, were forty others of about the same dimensions and placed in order according to their dates. It seemed as if each period had left its mark upon those of the personages that it had seen live and die, and had left something of its own character there.

There were more gallant cavaliers cut after the same pattern as the first. Their stern, harsh faces, red

beards and broad, square, military shoulders, told that by sword thrusts and broken lances they had founded the nobility of their race. An heroic preface to this family biography! A rough and war-like page of the middle ages! After these proud men of arms came several figures of a less ferocious aspect, but not so imposing. In these portraits of the fifteenth century beards had disappeared with the sword. In those wearing caps and velvet toques, silk robes and heavy gold chains supporting a badge of the same metal, one recognized lords in full and tranquil possession of the fiefs won by their fathers, land-owners who had degenerated a little and preferred mountain life in a manor to the chances of a more hazardous life. These pacific gentlemen were, for the most part, painted with the left hand gloved and resting upon the hip; the right one was bare, a sort of token of disarmament which one might take for a painter's epigram. Some of them had allowed their favorite dog to share the honors of the picture. All in this group indicated that this branch of the family had many points of resemblance with the more illustrious faces. It was the period of idle kings.

A half dozen solemn personages with gold braided hats and long red robes bordered with ermine, and wearing starched ruffles, occupied one corner of the parlor near the windows. These worthy advisers of the Dukes of Lorraine explained the way in which the masters of the chateau had awakened from the torpor in which they had been plunged for several generations, in order to participate in the affairs of their country and enter into a more active sphere. Here the row of portraits assumed the proportions of his-

tory. Did not this branch, descended from a warlike stock, seem like a fragment taken from the European annals? Was it not a symbolical image of the progress of civilization, of regular legislation struggling against barbaric customs? Thanks to these respectable counsellors and judges one might reverse the motto: *Non solum toga*, in favor of their race. But it did not seem as if these bearded ancestors looked with much gratitude upon this parliamentary flower added to their feudal crest. They seemed to look down from the height of their worm eaten frames upon their enrobed descendants with that disdainful smile with which the peers of France used to greet men of law the first time they were called to sit by their side, after having been for so long a time at their feet.

In the space between the windows and upon the remaining woodwork were a crowd of military men, with, here and there, an abbe with cross and mitre, a commander of Malta, and a solemn looking canon, sterile branches of this genealogical tree. Several among the military ones wore sashes and plumes of the colors of Lorraine; others, even before the union of this province to France, had served the latter country; there were lieutenant-colonels of infantry and cavalry; some dressed in blue coats lined with buff serge and little round patches of black plush which served as the uniform for the dragoons of the Lorraine legion.

The last of all was a young man with an agreeable face who smiled superciliously from under a vast head of powdered hair; a rose was in the button hole of his green cloth pelisse with orange facings, a red sabertache hung against his boots a little lower down

than the hilt of his sabre. The costume represented a sprightly officer of the Royal Nassau hussars. The portrait was hung on the left of the entrance door and only separated by it from his great grandfather of 1247, whom he might have assisted, had these venerable portraits taken some night a fancy to descend from their frames, in order to execute a dance such as Hoffmann dreamed of. These two persons were the alpha and omega of this genealogical tree, the two extreme links of the chain, one, the root buried in the sands of time, the other, the branch which had blossomed at the top. Fate had created a tragical resemblance between these two lives, separated by more than five centuries. The chevalier in coat of mail had been killed in the battle of the Mansourah during Saint Louis' first crusade. The young man with the supercilious smile had mounted the scaffold during the reign of terror, holding between his lips a rose, his usual decoration for his coat. The history of the French nobility was embodied in these two men, born in blood, who had died in blood.

Large gilded frames of Gothic style surrounded all these portraits. At the right, on the bottom of each picture, was painted a little escutcheon having for its crest a baronial coronet and for supports two wild men armed with clubs. The field was red; with its three bulls' heads in silver, it announced to people, well versed in heraldic art, that they had before them the lineaments of noble and powerful lords, squires of Reinsnach-Bergenheim, lords of Reinsnach in Suevia, barons of the Holy Empire, lords of Sapois, Labresse, Gerbamont, etc, counts of Bergenheim, the latter title granted them by Louis XV., chevaliers of Lorraine, etc., etc., etc.

This ostentatious enumeration was not needed in order to recognize the kindred of all these noble personages. Mixed with other portraits a careful observer would have promptly distinguished and reunited them, so pronounced were the family features common to them all. The furniture of the room was not unworthy these proud defunct ones. High backed chairs and enormous arm chairs dating from the time of Louis XIII; more modern sofas, which had been made to harmonize with the older furniture, filled the room. They were covered with flowered tapestry in thousands of shades, which must have busied the white hands of the ladies of the house for two or three generations past.

The row of portraits was interrupted on one side by a large fire-place of greyish granite which was too high for one to hang a mirror above, or place ornaments upon its mantel. Opposite was an ebony console inlaid with ivory upon which was placed one of those elegant clocks whose delicate and original chased work has not been eclipsed by any modern workmanship. Two large Japanese vases accompanied it; the whole was reflected in an antique mirror which hung above the console; its edges were bevelled, doubtless in order to cause one to admire the thickness of the glass.

It would be impossible to imagine a stronger contrast than that of this Gothic room with the lady in the rose colored dress who had just entered it so precipitately. The fire upon the hearth threw a warm light over the old portraits, and it was heightened by the heavy red damask curtains which hung by the windows. The light sometimes softened, sometimes

revivified by some sudden flash of the flames, glanced over the scowling faces and red beards, enlivening the eyes and giving a supernatural animation to these lifeless canvasses. One would have said that these cold, grave faces looked with curiosity at the young woman with graceful movements and cool garments, whom Aladdin's genii seemed to have transported from the most elegant boudoir on the Chaussee-d'Antin, and thrown, still frightened, into the midst of this strange assembly.

"You are crazy, Clemence to leave that window open!" said at this moment an old voice issuing from an arm-chair placed in a corner near the fire-place.

The person who broke the charm of this silent scene was a woman of sixty or seventy years of age, according to the gallantry of the calculator. It was easy to judge that she was tall and thin as she lay, rather than sat, in her chair with its back thrown down. She was dressed in a yellowish brown colored gown. A false front as black as jet, surmounted by a cap with poppy colored ribbons, framed her face. She had sharp, withered features, and the brilliancy of her primitive freshness had been converted into a blotched and pimpled complexion which affected above all her nose and cheek bones, but whose ardor had been dimmed but a trifle by age. There was something about the whole face as crabbed, sour and unkind as if she had daily bathed it in vinegar. One could read in every feature: old maid! Besides, a slight observation of her ways would have destroyed all lingering doubt in this respect.

A large coffee-colored pug dog was lying before the fire, this interesting animal serving as a foot stool for

his mistress stretched in her easy chair, and recalled to mind the lions which sleep at the foot of chevaliers in their Gothic tombs. As a pug dog and an old maid pertain to each other, it was only necessary, in order to divine this venerable lady's state, to read the name upon the golden collar which served as cravat for the dog: "Constance belongs to Mademoiselle de Corandeuil."

Before the younger lady, who was leaning upon the back of a chair seeming to breath with difficulty, had time to reply, she received a second injunction.

"But aunt," said she at last, "it was a horrible crash! did you not hear it?"

"I am not as deaf as that yet," replied the old maid. "Shut that window; do you not know that currents of air attract thunder?"

Clemence obeyed, dropping the curtain to shut out the flashes of lightning which continued to dart through the heavens; she then approached the fireplace.

"Since you are so afraid of the lightning," said her aunt; "which by the way, is perfectly ridiculous in a Corandeuil, what induced you to go out upon the balcony? The sleeve of your dress is wet. That is the way one gets cold; afterwards, there is nothing but an endless array of syrups and drugs. You ought to change your dress and put on something warmer. Who would ever think of dressing like that in such weather as this?"

"I assure you, aunt, it is not cold. It is because you have a habit of always being near the fire—"

"Ah! habit! when you are my age, you will not hint at such a thing. Now, everything goes wonder-

fully well; you never listen to my advice, you go out in the wind and rain with that crazy headed Aline and your husband who has no more sense than his sister; you will pay for it later. Open the curtains, I pray; the storm is over and I wish to read the Gazette."

The young woman obeyed a second time and stood with her forehead pressed against the glass. The distant rumbling of the thunder announced the end of the storm; but a few flashes still traversed the horizon.

"Aunt," said she after a moment's silence, "come and look at the Montigny rocks; when the lightning strikes them they look like a file of silver columns or a procession of ghosts."

"What a romantic speech," growled the old lady, never taking her eyes from her paper.

"I assure you I am not romantic the least in the world," replied Clemence. "I simply find the storm a distraction, and here, you know, there is no great choice in pleasures."

"Then you find it dull?"

"Oh! aunt, horribly so!" At these words pronounced with a heartfelt accent, the young woman dropped into an arm-chair.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil took off her glasses, put the paper upon the table and gazed for several moments at her pretty niece's face, which was tinged with a look of deep melancholy. She then straightened herself up in her chair and leaning forward asked in a low tone:

"Have you had any trouble with your husband?"

"If so, I should not be so bored," replied Clemence in a gay tone which she repented immediately, for she continued more calmly:

"No, aunt; Christian is kind, very kind; he is very much attached to me, and full of good humor and attentions. You have seen how he has allowed me to arrange my apartments to suit myself, even taking down the partition and enlarging the windows; and yet, you know how much he clings to everything that is old about the house. He tries to do everything for my pleasure. Did he not go to Strasbourg the other day to buy a pony for me, because I thought Titania was too skittish? It would be impossible to have shown greater kindness."

"Your husband," suddenly interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, for she held the praise of others in sovereign displeasure, "is a Bergenheim like all the Bergerheims present, past and future, including your little sister-in-law who appears more as if she had been brought up with boys than at the 'Sacred Heart.' He is a worthy son of his father there," said she pointing to one of the portraits near the young Royal-Nassau officer; "and he was the most brutal, unbearable and detestable of all the dragoons in Lorraine; so much so that he got into three quarrels, in one month at Nancy, at Metz, over a game of checkers, and he killed the poor Vicomte de Megrigny, who was worth a hundred of him and danced so well! Some one described Bergenheim as being 'proud as a peacock, as stubborn as a mule and as furious as a lion!' Ugly race! ugly race! What I say to you now, Clemence, is to excuse your husband's faults, for it would be time lost to try to correct them. However, all men are alike; and since you are Madame de Bergenheim, you must accept your fate and bear it as well as possible. And then, if you have your troubles, you still have your

good aunt to whom you can confide them and who will not allow you to be tyrannized over; I will speak to your husband."

Clemence saw, from the first words of this tirade, that she must arm herself with resignation; for anything which concerned the Bergenheims aroused one of the hobbies which the old maid rode with a most complacent spite; so she settled herself back in her chair like a person who would at least be comfortable while she listened to a tiresome discourse, and busied herself during this lecture caressing with the tip of a very shapely foot the top of one of the andirons.

"But aunt," said she at last when the tirade was over, and she gave a rather drawling expression to her voice. "I cannot understand why you have taken this idea into your head that Christian renders me unhappy; I repeat it, it is impossible that one should be kinder to me than he is and, on my side, I have the greatest respect and friendship for him."

"Very well, if he is such a pearl of husbands, if you live so much like turtle-doves—and, to tell the truth, I do not believe a word of it—what causes this ennui of which you complain and which has been perfectly noticeable for some time. When I say ennui, it is more than that; it is sadness, it is grief. You grew thinner every day; you are as pale as a ghost; just at this moment, your complexion is gone; you will end by being a regular fright. They say that it is the fashion to be pale nowadays; a silly notion indeed, but it will not last, for complexion makes the woman."

The old lady said this like a person who had her reasons for not liking pale complexions and who gladly took pimples for roses.

Madame de Bergenheim bowed her head as if to acquiesce in this decision and then resumed in her drawing voice:

"I know that I am very unreasonable, and I am often vexed with myself for having so little control over my feeling, but it is beyond my strength. I have a tired sensation, a disgust for everything, something which I cannot overcome. It is an unexplainable physical and moral languor, and which, for this reason, I see no remedy for. I am weary and I suffer; I am sure it will end in my being ill. Sometimes I wish I were dead. However I have really no reason to be unhappy. I suppose I am happy—I ought to be happy."

"Truly, I cannot understand in the least the women of to-day. Formerly, upon exciting occasions, we had a good nervous attack and all was over; the crisis passed, we became amiable again, put on rouge and went to a ball. Now it is languor, ennui, stomach troubles—all imagination and humbug! The men are just as bad and they call it spleen! Spleen! a new discovery, an English importation! There are fine things come to us from England; to begin with the constitutional government! All this is perfectly ridiculous. As for you, Clemence, you ought to put an end to such childishness. Two months ago, in Paris, you did not have any of the rest that you enjoy here. I had serious reasons for wishing to delay my departure; my apartment to refurnish, my neuralgia which still troubles me—and Constance, who had just been in the hands of the doctor was hardly in a condition to travel, poor creature! You would listen to nothing; we had to submit to your caprices and now—"

"But aunt, you admitted yourself that it was the proper thing for me to do, to join my husband. Was it not enough, and too much, to have left him to pass the entire winter alone here while I was dancing in Paris?"

"It was very proper of course and I do not blame you. But why does the very thing you so much desired two months ago bore you so terribly now? In Paris you talked all the time of Bergenheim, longed only for Bergenheim, you had duties to fulfill, you wished to be with your husband; you bothered and wore me out with your conjugal love. When back to Bergenheim you dream and sigh for Paris. Do not shake your head; I am an old aunt whom you pay no heed to but who sees clearly yet. Will you do me the favor to tell me what it is that you regret in Paris at this time of year when there are no balls or parties, and not one human being worth visiting, for all the people you know are in the country? Is it because—"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil did not finish her sentence, but she put a severity into these three words which seemed to condense all the quintessence of prudery that a celibacy of sixty years could coagulate in an old maid's heart.

Clemence raised her eyes up to her aunt's face as if to demand an explanation.

There was such a calm steady glance in her look that the latter could not help being impressed by it.

"Well," said she, softening her voice, "there is no necessity for putting on such queenly airs; we are here alone and you know that I am a kind aunt to you. Now then speak freely, have you left any thing or any person in Paris, the remembrance of which makes your

sojourn here still more tiresome than it really is? Any of your adorers of the winter?"

"What an idea, aunt! anyhow, did I have any adorers?" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim quickly, as if trying to conceal by a smile the rosy flush which mounted to her cheeks.

"And what if you should have had some, child?" continued the old maid to whom curiosity lent an unaccustomed coaxing accent to her voice, "where should be the harm? Is it forbidden to please? When one is of good birth must one not live in society and hold one's position there? One need not bury oneself in a desert at twenty-three years of age and you really are charming enough to inspire love; you understand, I do not say, to experience it. But when one is young and pretty, conquests are made almost unwittingly. You are not the first of the family it has happened to, you are a Corandeuil. Now then, my good Clemence, what troubled heart is pining for you in Paris? is it Monsieur de Mauleon?"

"Monsieur de Mauleon!" exclaimed the young woman bursting into laughter; "he, a heart! and a troubled one too! Oh, aunt, you do him honor! Monsieur de Mauleon, who is past forty-five years old and wears stays! an audacious man who squeezes his partners hand in the dance and looks at them with passionate glances! Oh! Monsieur de Mauleon!"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil sanctioned by a slight grimace of her thin lips her niece's burst of gayety, when, with one hand upon her heart, she rolled her sparkling eyes in imitation of the languishing air of her unfortunate adorer.

"Perhaps it is Monsieur d'Arzenac?"

"Monsieur d'Arzenac is certainly very nice; he has perfect manners; it may be that he did not disdain to chat with me; on my side, I found his conversation very entertaining; but you may rest assured that he did not think of me nor I of him. Besides you know that he is engaged to marry Mademoiselle de la Neuville."

"Monsieur de Gerfaut?" continued Mademoiselle de Corandeuil with the persistency with which aged people follow an idea, and as if determined to pass in review all the young men of their acquaintance until she had discovered her niece's secret.

The latter was silent a moment before replying.

"How can you think of such a thing, aunt?" said she at last, "a man with such a bad reputation, who writes books that one scarcely dares read, and plays that it's almost a sin to go and witness! Did you not hear Madame de Pontivers say that a young woman who cared for her reputation would permit his visits but very rarely?"

"Madame de Pontivers is a prude whom I cannot endure, with her show of little grimaces and her pretentious, outrageous mock-modesty. Did she not take it into her head this winter to constitute me her chaperon? I gave her to understand that a widow forty years old was quite old enough to go about alone! She has a mania for fearing that she may be compromised. The idea of turning up her nose at Monsieur de Gerfaut! What presumption! He certainly is too bright to ever solicit the honor of being bored to death in her house; for he is clever, very clever. I never could understand your dislike for him, nor your haughty manner of treating him; especially, during the latter part of our stay in Paris."

"One is not mistress of one's dislikes or affections, aunt. But to reply to your questions, I will say that you may rest assured that none of these gentlemen, nor any of those whom you might name, have the slightest to do with my state of mind. I am bored because it probably is my nature to need distractions, and there are none in this deserted place. It is an involuntary disagreeableness for which I reproach myself and which I hope will pass away. Rest assured that the root of the evil does not lie in my heart."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil understood by the cold and rather dry tone in which these words were spoken that her niece wished to keep her secret, if she had one; she could not prevent a gesture of anger as she saw her advances thus repulsed, but felt that she was no wiser than when she began the conversation. She manifested her disappointment by pushing the dog aside with her foot—the poor thing was perfectly innocent—and in a cross tone which was much more familiar than her former coaxing one, she continued:

"Very well, since I am wrong, since your husband adores you and you him, since, to sum it all up, your heart is perfectly tranquil and free, your conduct is devoid of common sense and I advise you to change it. I warn you that all this hypochondria, paleness and languor are caprices which are very disagreeable to others. There is a Provence proverb which says: *Vaillance de Blacas, prudence de Pontevez, caprice de Corandeuil*. If there was not such a saying it ought to be created for you, for you have something incomprehensible enough in your character to make a saint swear. If anybody ought to know you, it is I who brought you up. I do not wish to reproach you, but

you gave me trouble enough, you were a most wayward, capricious and fantastic creature, a spoiled child—"

"Aunt," interrupted Clemence with heightened color in her pale cheeks. "You have told me of my faults often enough for me to know them and, if they were not corrected, it was not your fault for you never spared me scoldings. If I had not been so unfortunate as to lose my mother when a baby, I should not have given you so much trouble."

Tears came into the young woman's eyes, but she had enough control over herself to keep them from streaming down her burning cheeks. Taking a journal from the table, she opened it, in order to conceal her emotion and to put an end to this conversation which had become painful to her. Mademoiselle de Coran-deuil, on her side, carefully replaced her glasses upon her nose and solemnly stretching herself upon her chair she turned over the leaves of the *Gazette de France* which she had neglected so long.

Silence reigned for some moments in the room. The old maid apparently read the paper very attentively. Her niece sat motionless with her eyes fastened upon the yellow cover of the last number of *La Mode* which had chanced to fall into her hands. She aroused herself at last from her reverie and carelessly turned over the leaves of the review in a manner which showed how little interest she felt in it. As she turned the first page a surprised cry escaped her and her eyes were fastened upon the pamphlet with eager curiosity. Upon the frontispiece, where the Duchess de Berry's coat of arms is engraved and in the middle of the shield which was left empty at this time by the ab-

sence of the usual *fleurs de lys* was sketched with a pencil a bird whose head was surmounted by a baron's coronet.

Curious to know what could have caused her niece so much surprise, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stretched out her neck and gazed for an instant upon the page without seeing, at first, anything extraordinary but finally her glance rested upon the armorial bearings and she discovered the new feature added to the royal Bourbon coat of arms.

"A cock!" exclaimed she after a moments reflection: "a cock upon Madame's shield! What can that mean, *bon Dieu* and it is not engraved nor lithographed; it is drawn with a pencil."

"It is not a cock, it is a crowned gerfaut," said Madame de Bergenheim.

"A gerfaut! How do you know what a gerfaut is? At Corandeuil, in your grandfather's time there was a falconry and I have seen gerfauts there, but you—I tell you it is a cock, an old French cock; ugly thing! What you take for a coronet, and it really does resemble one, is a badly drawn cock's comb. How did this horrid creature come to be there? I should like to know if such pretty tricks are permitted at the post-office. People protest against the *cabinet noir* but it is a hundred times worse if one is permitted to outrage with impunity peaceable families in their own homes. I mean to find out who has played this trick. Will you be so kind as to ring the bell.

"It really is very strange!" said Madame de Bergenheim pulling the bell rope with a vivacity which showed that she shared, if not the indignation, at least the curiosity of her aunt.

A servant in green livery appeared.

"Who went to Remiremont yesterday for the papers?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"It was Pere Rousselet, Mademoiselle," replied the servant.

"Where is Monsieur de Bergenheim?"

"Monsieur le baron is playing billards with Mademoiselle Aline."

"Send Leonard Rousselet here."

And Mademoiselle de Corandeuil settled herself back in her chair with the dignity of a chancellor who is going to hold court.

CHAPTER III.

The servants in the castle of Bergenheim formed a family whose members were far from living in harmony. The baron managed his household himself, and employed a large number of day laborers, farm servants and kitchen girls, whom the liveried servants treated with great disdain. The rustics, on their side, resisted these privileged lackeys and called them "coxcombs" and "Parisians," sometimes accompanying these remarks with most expressive blows. Between these tribes of sworn enemies a third class, much less numerous, found themselves in a critical position; these were the two servants brought by Mademoiselle de Corandeuil. It was fortunate for them that their mistress liked large, vigorous men and had chosen them for their broad military shoulders, but for that, it would have been impossible for them to have come out of their daily quarrels safe and sound.

The question of superiority between the two households had been the first apple of discord, a number of personal quarrels followed, to inflame them. They fought for their colors the whole time, the Bergenheim livery was red, the Corandeuil green. There were two flags; each one exalted his own whilst throwing his adversaries in the mud. Greenhorn! and crab! were jokes, cucumber! and lobster! Insults. Such were the gracious interpellations exchanged every day between

the two parties. In the midst of this civil war, which was carefully concealed from their masters' eyes, whose severity they feared, lived one rather singular personage. Leonard Rousselet, pere Rousselet as he was generally called, was an old peasant who, disheartened with life, had made various efforts to get out of his sphere but had never succeeded in doing so. After having been successively hair-dresser, sexton, school-teacher, nurse and gardener he had ended, when sixty years old, by falling back to the very point where he started from. He had no particular employment in M. de Bergenheim's house; he went on errands, cared for the gardens and doctored the mules and horses; he was a tall man, about as much at ease in his clothing as a dry almond in its shell. A long, dark, yellow coat usually hung about the calves of his legs which were covered with long, blue woolen stockings, and looked more like vine poles than human legs; a conformation which furnished daily jokes for the other servants, to which the old man deigned no response save a disdainful smile and grumbling through his teeth: "Menials! peasants without education." This latter speech expressed the late gardener's scorn, for it had been his greatest grief to pass for an uneducated man; and he had gathered from his various conditions a singularly dignified and pretentious way of speaking.

In spite of his self-confidence, it was not without some emotion that Leonard Rousselet responded to this call to appear in the drawing-room before the person the most feared in the chateau. His bearing showed this feeling when he presented himself at the drawing-room door where he stood as grave and silent

as Banquo's ghost. Constance arose, at sight of this fantastic figure, barking furiously and darted towards a pair of legs for which she seemed to share the irreverence of the liveried servants; but the texture of the blue stocking and the flesh which covered the tibia were rather too hard a morsel for the dowager's teeth; she was obliged to give up the attack and content herself with impotent barks, while the old man, who would gladly have given a month's wages to break her jaw with the tip of his boot, caressed her with his hand saying: "Softly, pretty dear; softly, pretty little creature!" in a hypocritical tone of voice.

This courtier-like conduct touched the old lady's heart and softened the severe look upon her face.

"Stop your noise, Constance," said she, "lie down beside your mistress. Rousselet, come nearer."

The old man obeyed, walking across the floor with reverential bows and taking a position like a soldier presenting arms.

"You were the one," said Mademoiselle de Coran-deuil, "who was sent to Remiremont yesterday? Did you do all the commissions that were given you?"

"It is not among the impossibilities, Mademoiselle, that I may have neglected some of them," replied the old man fearing to compromise himself by a positive affirmative.

"Tell us then what you did."

Leonard wiped his nose behind his hat like a well bred orator, and balancing himself upon his legs in a way not at all Bourbonic, he said:

"I went to the city that morning myself because that M.le Baron had said the night before that he should hunt to-day, and that the groom was to help

M. le Baron drive a wild boar out of the Corne woods. I reached Remiremont; I went to the butchers; I purchased five kilogrammes of dressed goods--"

"Of dressed goods at the butchers!" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim.

"I would say ten pounds of what uneducated people call pork," said Rousselet pronouncing this last word in a strangled voice.

"Pass over these details," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil. "You went to the postoffice."

"I went to the postoffice, where I put in letters for Mademoiselle, Madame, M. le baron and one from Mademoiselle Aline for M. d'Artigues."

"Aline writing to her cousin! Did you know that?" said the old maid turning quickly towards her niece.

"Certainly, they correspond regularly," replied Clemence with a smile which seemed to say that she saw no harm in it.

The old maid shook her head and protruded her under lip, as much as to say, we will attend to this another time.

Madame de Bergenheim, who was out of patience at this questioning, began to speak in a quick tone of voice which was a contrast to her aunt's solemn slowness.

"Rousselet," said she, "when you took the papers out of the office did you notice whether the wrappers were intact or whether they had been opened?"

The good man half concealed his face in his cravat at this precise questioning and it was with embarrassment that he replied, after a moment's hesitation:

"Certainly, Madame—as to the wrappers—I do not accuse the postmaster—"

"If the journals were sealed when you received them, you are the only one who could have opened them."

Rousselet straightened himself up to his full height and giving to his nut-cracker face the most dignified look possible he said in a solemn tone:

"With due deference to you, Madame, Leonard Rousselet is well known. Fifty-seven years old on Saint-Hubert's day! I am incapable of opening papers. When they have been read at the chateau and they send me with them to the curé, I do not say—perhaps on my way—it is a recreation—and then the curé is Jean Bartou, son of Joseph Bartou, the tile maker. But to read the paper before my masters have done so! Never! Leonard Rousselet is an old man incapable of such baseness. Baptised when a child; fifty-seven years on Saint-Hubert's day."

"When you speak of your pastor, do so in a more becoming manner," interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, although she herself in private did not speak of the plebeian priest in very respectful terms. But if Joseph Bartou's son was always the son of Joseph Bartou to her, she meant that he should be M.le curé to the peasants.

Madame de Bergenheim had not been much affected by Pere Rousselet's harangue and shook her head impatiently saying in an imperative tone:

"I am certain that the papers have been opened by you or some person to whom you have given them, and I wish to know at once by whom."

Rousselet dropped his pose of a Roman senator; passing his hand behind his ears, a familiar gesture with people when in embarrassing positions, he continued in a less emphatic tone:

"I stopped on my way back at La Fauconnerie, at the 'Femme-sans-Tete, Inn."

"And what were you doing in a tavern?" interrupted Mademoiselle de Corandeuil in a severe tone of voice. "You know that it is not intended that the servants in this house should frequent taverns and such low places, which are not respectable and corrupt the morals of the lower classes."

"Servants! lower classes! Old aristocrat!" growled Rousselet secretly; but, not daring to show his ill humor, he replied in a bland voice:

"If Mademoiselle had gone the same road that I did with the same conveyance, she would know that it is a rather thirsty stretch. I stopped at the 'Femme-sans-Tete' to wash the dust down my œsophagus. Whereupon Mademoiselle Reine—the daughter of Madame Gobillot, the landlady of the inn—Mademoiselle Reine asked me to allow her to look at the yellow journal in which there are fashions for ladies; I asked her why; she said it was so that she might see how they made their bonnets, dresses and other finery in Paris. The frivolity of women!"

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil threw herself back in her chair and gave way to an access of hilarity which she rarely indulged in.

"Mademoiselle Gobillot reading *La Mode*! Mademoiselle Gobillot talking of dresses, shawls and cashmeres! Clemence, what do you say to that? You will see, she will be ordering her bonnets from Herbault! Ah! Ah! This is what is called the progress of civilization, the age of light!"

"Mademoiselle Gobillot," said Clemence fixing a penetrating glance upon the old man, "was not the

only one who looked at *La Mode*. Was there no other person in the tavern who saw it?"

"Madame," replied Rousselet forced from his last refuge, "there were two young men taking their refection, and one of them wore a beard no longer than a goat's. Madame will pardon me if I allow myself to use this vulgar expression but Madame wished to know all."

"And the other young man?"

"The other had his facial epidermis shaved as close as a lady's or mine. He was the one who held the journal while his comrade was smoking outside the door."

Madame de Bergenheim made no farther inquiries but fell into a profound reverie. With eyes fixed upon the last number of *La Mode*, she seemed to study the slightest lines of the sketch that had been made thereon as if she hoped to find a solution to the mystery. Her irregular breathing and the bright flush which tinged her usually pale cheeks would have denoted to an eye-witness one of those tempests of the heart, the physical manifestations of which are like those of a fever. The pale winter flower dying under the snow had suddenly raised its drooping head and recovered its color; the melancholy against which the young woman had so vainly struggled had disappeared as if by enchantment. A little bird surmounted by a coronet, the whole rather badly sketched, was the strange talisman that had produced this change.

"They were commercial travellers," said the old aunt; "they always pretend to know everything. One of them, doubtless when reading the well known name of M. de Bergenheim upon the wrapper, sketched

the animal in question. These gentlemen of industry generally have a rather good education! But this is giving the affair more importance than it merits. Leonard Rousselet," said she, raising her voice as a judge does in court when pronouncing his charge, you were wrong to let anything addressed to your master leave our hands. We will excuse you this time but I warn you to be more careful in future; when you go to Madame Gobillot's, you may say to Mademoiselle Reine, from me, that if she wishes to read *La Mode* I shall be delighted to procure a subscriber to one of our journals. You may retire now."

Without waiting for this invitation to be repeated, Rousselet backed out of the room like an ambassador leaving the royal presence, escorted by Constance acting the master of ceremonies. Not having calculated the distance, he had just bumped against the door when it suddenly opened and a person of extreme vivacity bounded into the middle of the room.

It was a very young and tiny young lady, but whose perfectly developed form predicted an inclination to stoutness in the future. She belonged to the Bergeheim family, if one could credit the resemblance between her characteristic features and several of the old portraits in the room; she wore a dark brown riding habit, a gray hat perched on one side, showing on the left side a head of very curly bright blonde hair. This coiffure and the long green veil, floating at each movement like the plume in a helmet, gave a singularly easy air to the fresh face of this pretty amazon, who brandished, in guise of a lance, a billiard cue.

"Clemence," she exclaimed, "I have just beaten

Christian; I made the red ball, I made the white, and then the double stroke; I made all. Mademoiselle, I have just beaten Christian two games; is it not glorious? he only made eighteen points in a single game. Pere Rousselet, I have just beaten Christian! Do you know how to play billiards?"

"Mademoiselle Aline, I am absolutely ignorant of the game," replied the old man with as gracious a smile as possible while trying to recover his equilibrium.

"You are needed no longer, Rousselet," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil; "close the door as you go out."

When she had been obeyed, the old maid turned gravely towards Aline who was still dancing about the room having seized her sister-in-law's hands in order to force her to share her childish joy.

"Mademoiselle," said she in a severe tone of voice, "is it the custom at the 'Sacred Heart' to enter a room without greeting the persons who are in it, and to jump about like a crazy person? a thing that is never permitted even in a peasant's house."

Aline stopped short in the midst of her dance and blushed a trifle; she caressed the pug dog instead of replying, for she knew as well as Rousselet that it was the surest way of softening the old maid's heart. The cajolery was lost this time.

"Do not touch Constance, I beg of you," exclaimed the old maid, as if a dagger had been raised against the object of her love, "do not dirty this poor beast with your hands. What dreadful thing have you on your fingers? Have you just come out of an indigo bag?"

The young girl blushed still deeper and gazed at her pretty hands which were really a little daubed,

and commenced to wipe them with an embroidered handkerchief which she took from her pocket.

"It was the billiards," she said in a low voice, "it is blue chalk they rub the cue with in order to make good shots and caroms."

"Make good shots! caroms! Will you be so good as to spare us your slang speeches," continued Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who seemed to become more crabbed as the young girl's confusion increased. "What a fine education for a young lady! and one who has just come from the 'Sacred Heart!' One that has taken five prizes not fifteen days ago! I really do not know what to think of these ladies, your teachers! And now I suppose you are going to ride. Billiards and horses, horses and billiards! It is fine! It is admirable!"

"But, Mademoiselle," said Aline raising her large blue eyes which were on the verge of tears, "it is vacation now and there is no wrong in my playing a game of billiards with my brother; we have no billiards at the 'Sacred Heart', and it is such fun! It is like riding; the doctor said that it would be very healthy for me, and Christian hoped that it might make me grow a little."

As she said these words, the young girl glanced into the mirror in order to see if her brother's hopes had been realized; for her small stature was her sole worry. But this glance was as quick as a flash for she feared that the severe old maid would make this act of coquetry serve as the text for another sermon.

"You are not my niece and I am thankful for it," continued the old lady. "I am too old to begin another education; thank goodness, one is quite enough!"

I have no authority over you and your conduct is your brother's concern. The advice which I give you is entirely disinterested; your amusements are not such as seem to me proper for a young girl of good birth; it may be possible that it is the fashion to-day, so I will say no more about it; but there is one thing more serious and upon which I should advise you to reflect. In my youth, a young lady never was allowed to write except to her father and mother. Your letters to your cousin d'Artigues are inconsiderate—do not interrupt me—they are inconsiderate and I should advise you to mend your ways."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil arose and as she had found an opportunity to read three sermons in one morning, she could not say like Titus: "I have wasted my morning." She left the room with a majestic step escorted by her dog and satisfied with herself, bestowing an ironical curtesy on the young girl which the latter did not think it necessary to return.

"How hateful your aunt is" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Bergenheim to her sister-in-law when they were alone. "Christian says that I must pay no attention to her because all women become like her if they never marry. As for myself, I know very well that if I am an old maid I shall try not to hurt others' feelings—I, inconsiderate! When she can think of nothing more to say, she scolds me about my cousin. It is hardly worth while for what we write about! Alphonse speaks of nothing, in his last letter, but of the partridge he has shot and his hunting costume; he is such a boy! But why do you not say something; you sit there speechless; are you angry with me too?"

She approached Clemence and was about to seat

herself in her lap, when the latter arose to avoid this loving familiarity.

"So you really have beaten Christian," said she in a listless tone; "are you going for a ride now? Your dress is very becoming."

"Truly? oh! I am so glad!" replied the young girl planting herself before the glass to look at her pretty figure; she pulled down her waist, adjusted the folds of the skirt of her dress and arranged her veil, placed her hat on her head with a little more jaunty air, turned three quarters round to get a better view of her costume; in one word, she went through the coquettish movements that all pretty women learn upon entering society. On the whole, she seemed very well pleased with her examination, for she smiled and showed a row of cunning teeth which were as white as milk.

"I am sorry now," said she, "that I did not send for a black hat; my hair is so light that gray makes me look ugly. Do you not think so? Why do you not reply, Clemence; one cannot get a word out of you to-day; is it because you have your neuralgia?"

"I have a trifle of it," said Madame de Bergenheim, in order to give some pretext for her preoccupation.

"Now then, you ought to come with us for a ride; the fresh air will do you good. Look how fine the weather is now; we will have a good gallop; will you? I will help you put on your dress and in five minutes you will be ready; listen, I hear them in the yard now, I am going to tell Christian to have your horse saddled; come."

Aline took her sister-in-law by the hand, led her into the next room and opened the window to see what was going on outside, where the cracking of

whips and several voices were to be heard. A servant was walking up and down the yard leading a large horse which he had just brought from the stable; the baron was holding a smaller one, which bore a lady's saddle, while he carefully examined all the buckles. As he heard the window open above his head, he turned and bowed to Clemence with much chivalrous gallantry.

"You still refuse to go with us?" he asked.

"Is Aline going to ride Titania," replied Madame de Bergenheim making an effort to speak; "I am sure the mare will end by playing her some trick."

The young girl who had a fancy for Titania because the skittish creature had the attraction of forbidden fruit, nudged her sister with her elbow, and made a little grimace.

"Aline is afraid of nothing," said the baron, "we will enlist her with the hussars as soon as she leaves the 'Sacred Heart.' Come, Aline."

The young girl kissed the baroness, gathered up the skirt of her dress and in a few moments was in the yard patting the neck of her dear brown mare.

"Up with you!" said Christian taking his sister's foot in one hand while he raised her with the other, placing her in the saddle as easily as he would a six year old child. Then he mounted his large horse, saluted his wife, and the couple starting off on a trot, soon disappeared down the avenue which began at the gate of the courtyard.

As soon as they were out of sight, Clemence went to her room, took a shawl from her bed, and went rapidly down a secret stairway which led into the gardens.

CHAPTER IV.

Madame de Bergenheim's apartments occupied the first floor of the wing on the left side of the house. On the ground floor were the library, a bath-room and several guest chambers. The large windows had a modern look, but they were made to harmonize with the rest of the house by means of grayish paint. At the foot of this facade, was a lawn surrounded by a wall and orange trees planted in tubs forming a sort of English garden, a sanctuary reserved for the mistress of the castle, and which brought her as a morning tribute, the perfume of its flowers and the coolness of its shade. Through the tops of some fir trees and the foliage of the tulip trees which rose above the group of smaller shrubs, the eye could follow the winding river until it finally disappeared at the extremity of the valley. It was this picturesque view, and a more extensive horizon which had induced the baroness to choose this part of the gothic manor for her own private apartments.

After crossing the lawn, the young woman opened a gate concealed by shrubs and entered the avenue by the banks of the river. This avenue described a curve around the garden, and led to the principal entrance of the chateau. Night was approaching, the country side which had been momentarily disturbed by the storm had resumed its customary serenity. The leaves of the trees, as often happens after a rain, looked as

fresh as a newly varnished picture. The setting sun cast long shadows through the trees and their interlaced branches looked like a forest of boa constrictors. Clemence slowly advanced, under this dome which became darker and more mysterious every moment, with head bent and enveloped in a large cashmere shawl which fell in irregular folds to the ground. Madame de Bergenheim had one of those faces which other women would call not at all remarkable, but which intelligent men ardently admire. At the first glance she seemed hardly pretty; at the second she attracted involuntary admiration; afterwards, it was difficult to keep her out of one's thoughts. Features, which taken separately might seem irregular, were singularly harmonious, and, like a thin veil which softens a too dazzling light, softened the whole expression. Her light chestnut hair was arranged about the temples in ingenious wavelets; while her still darker eye-brows gave, at times, an imposing gravity to her face. The same contrast was to be found in the mouth; the short distance which separated it from the nose would indicate, according to Lavater, unusual energy; but the prominent under-lip impregnated her smile with angelic voluptuousness. Her rather clear cut features, the excessive brilliancy of her brown eyes, which seemed like diamonds set in jet, would, perhaps, have given to the whole rather too strong a character had not these eyes when veiled given to their dazzling rays a glamour of unutterable softness.

The effect produced by this face might be compared to that of a prism, every face of which reflects a different color. The ardor burning under this changeable surface, and which through some sudden cause betrayed

its presence, was so deeply hidden, however, that it seemed impossible to fathom it completely. Was she a coquette, or simply a fashionable lady, or a devotee? in one word, was she imbued with the most egotistical pride or the most exalted love; one supposed anything and knew nothing; one remained undecided and thoughtful but fascinated, the mind plunged into ecstatic contemplation such as the portrait of Monna Lisa inspires. An observer might have perceived that she had one of those hearts, so finely strung, that a clever hand might make incomparable harmonies of passion gush forth from it; but perhaps he would be mistaken. So many women have their souls in their eyes!

Madame de Bergenheim's reverie rendered the mysterious and impenetrable veil which usually enveloped her countenance more unfathomable yet. What sentiment made her bend her head and walk slowly as she meditated? Was it the ennui of which she had just complained to her aunt? Was it pure melancholy? The monotonous ripple of the stream, the singing of the birds in the woods, the long golden reflections under the trees, all seemed to unite in filling the soul with sadness; but neither the murmuring water, the singing birds, nor the sun's splendor were paid any attention to by Madame de Bergenheim; she gave them neither a glance nor a sigh. Her meditation was not reverie but thought; not thoughts of the past but of the present. There was something precise and positive in the rapid intelligent glance which flashed from her eyes when she raised them; it was like the lucid foresight of a near drama.

A moment after she had passed over the wooden

bridge which led from the avenue, a man wearing a blouse crossed it and followed her. Hearing the sound of hurried steps behind her, she turned and saw, not two steps from her, the stranger, who, during the storm, had vainly tried to attract her attention. There was a moment's silence. The young man stood motionless trying to catch his breath, which had been hurried either by emotion or rapid walking. Madame de Bergenheim, with head thrown back and widely opened eyes, looked at him with a more agitated than surprised look.

"It is you," exclaimed he impulsively, "you whom I had lost and now find again!"

"What madness, monsieur!" replied she in a low voice putting out her hand as if to stop him.

"I beg of you, do not look at me so! Let me gaze at you and assure myself that it is really you,—I have dreamed of this moment for so long! Have I not paid dear enough for it? Two months passed away from you—from heaven! Two months of sadness, grief and unhappiness! But you are pale! Do you suffer too?"

"Much, at this moment."

"Clemence!"

"Call me Madame, Monsieur de Gerfaut," interrupted she in a severe tone of voice.

"Why should I disobey you? Are you not my lady, my queen?"

He bent his knee as a sign of bondage, and tried to seize her hand which she immediately withdrew. Madame de Bergenheim seemed to pay very little attention to the words addressed her; her uneasy glances wandered in every direction, into the depths of the bushes

and the slightest undulations of the ground. Gerfaut understood this pantomime. He glanced, in his turn, over the place and soon discovered at some distance away a more propitious place for such a conversation as theirs. It was a semi-circular recess in one of the thickets in the park. A rustic seat under a large oak seemed to have been placed there expressly for those who came to seek solitude and speak of love. From there, one could see the approach of danger and, in case of alarm, the wood offered a most secure retreat. The young man had had enough experience in gallant strategies to seize the advantage of this position, and wended his steps in that direction while continuing to converse. It may be that instinct, which in a critical position, makes us mechanically follow an unknown impulse, it may be that the same idea of prudence had also struck her, for Madame de Bergenheim commenced to walk beside him.

"If you could understand what I suffered," said he, "when I found that you had left Paris! I could not discover at first where you had gone to; some spoke of Corandeuil, others of Italy. I thought, from this hasty departure and the care you took to conceal your abiding place, that you were fleeing from me. Oh! tell me that I was mistaken; or, if it is true that you wished to separate yourself from me, say, that this cruel resolve had left your mind, and that you will pardon me for following you! You will pardon me, will you not? If I trouble or annoy you, lay the blame entirely upon my love, which I cannot restrain and which drives me at times to do the most extravagant things; call it reckless, insane love if you will; but believe it to be true and devoted!"

Clemence replied to this passionate tirade by simply shaking her head as a child does who hears the buzzing of a wasp and fears its sting, then, as they reached the bench, she said with affected surprise:

"You have made a mistake, this is not your road; you should have gone over the bridge."

There was a little palpable insincerity in these words; for if the road which they had taken did not lead to the bridge, neither did it lead to the chateau and the mistake, if there was one, was mutual.

"Listen to me, I beg of you," replied the lover with a supplicating glance, "I have so many things to say to you! I beg of you, grant me one moment."

"Afterwards, will you obey me?"

"Only a few words and I will then do all that you wish."

She hesitated a moment; then her conscience doubtless lulled by this promise, she seated herself and made a gesture for M. de Gerfaut to do likewise. The young man did not make her repeat this invitation, but hypocritically seated himself on the further end of the seat.

"Now talk reasonably," said she in a calm tone. "I suppose that you are on your way to Germany or Switzerland, and as you passed near me you wished to favor me with a call. I ought to be proud of this mark of respect from a man as celebrated as you are, although you are rather hiding your light under this garb. We are not very strict as to dress in the country, but really, yours is quite uncereemonious. Tell me, where did you ever find that head dress?"

These last words were spoken with the careless, mocking gayety of a young girl.

Gerfaut smiled, but he took off his cap. Knowing the importance that women attach to little things and what an irreparable impression a snobbish cravat or unblacked boots might produce in the most affecting moments, he did not wish to compromise himself by a ridiculous head gear. He passed his hand through his hair pushing it back from his large, broad forehead, and said softly:

"You know very well that I am not going to Germany or Switzerland, and that, Bergenheim is the end of my journey as it has been its aim."

"Then, will you be so good as to tell me what your intention was in taking such a step, and whether you have realized how strange, inconsiderate and in every way extravagant your conduct is?"

"I have realized it; I know it. You were here, I came because there is a loadstone within you, that is my heart's sole attraction, and I must follow my heart. I came, because I wanted to see your beautiful eyes again, to be intoxicated by your sweet voice, because to live away from you is impossible for me; because your presence is as necessary to my happiness as air to my life; because I love you. That is why I came. Is it possible that you do not understand me, that you will not pardon me?"

"I do not wish to believe that you are speaking seriously," said Clemence with increased severity. "What sort of an idea can you have of me, if you think I will allow of such conduct? And then, even if I were foolish enough for that—which I never shall be—what would it lead to? You know perfectly well that it is impossible for you to come to the castle, as you are not acquainted with Monsieur de Bergenheim, and

I certainly shall not introduce you to him. My aunt is here, and she would persecute me the whole day long with questions! Mon Dieu! how you disturb me! how unhappy you make me!"

"Your aunt never goes out, so she will not see me, unless I am officially received at the chateau, and then, there could be no danger."

"But the servants she brought with her, and mine who have seen you in her house! I tell you the whole thing is as perilous as it is crazy, and you will make me die of fright and chagrin."

"If one of these servants should chance to meet me, how could he ever recognize me in this costume? Do not fear, I shall be prudent! I would live in a log cabin, if necessary, for the joy of seeing you occasionally."

Madame de Bergenheim smiled disdainfully.

"It would be quite pastoral," she replied; "but I believe that such disguises are seldom seen now except upon the stage. If this is a scene out of a play which you wish to rehearse in order to better judge its effect, I warn you that it is entirely lost upon me, and that I consider the play itself very ill-timed, improper and ridiculous. Besides, for a man of talent and a romantic poet you have not exhibited any very great imagination. It is a classical imitation, nothing better. There is something like it in mythology, I believe. Did not Apollo disguise himself as a shepherd?"

There is nothing more to be feared by a lover than a witty woman who does not love or loves but half; he is obliged to wear velvet gloves in all such sentimental controversies; he owes it to himself out of pro-

priety first, out of prudence afterwards. For it is not a question of taking part in a conversation for the simple pleasure of a well marked repartee; and while he applies himself carefully to play his part well, he feels that he has been dextrously cut to pieces with a well sharpened knife.

Gerfaut indulged in these unpleasant reflections while gazing at Madame de Bergenheim. Seated upon the bench as proudly as a queen upon her throne, with shining eyes, scornful lips and arms tightly folded under her cashmere shawl, with that haughty gesture familiar to her, the young woman looked as invulnerable under this light wrap as if she had been covered with Ajax's shield, formed, if we can credit Homer, of seven bull's hides and a sheet of brass.

After having gazed at this scornful face for a moment, Gerfaut glanced at his coarse blouse, his leggings and muddy boots. His usual dainty ways made the details of this costume yet more shocking to him, and he exaggerated this little disaster. He felt degraded and almost ridiculous. The thought took away for a moment, his presence of mind; he commenced to mechanically twirl his hat in his hands, no more nor less than as if he had been Pere Rousselet himself. But instead of being hurtful to him, this awkwardness served him better than the eloquence of Rousseau or the coolness of Richelieu. Was it not a genuine triumph for Clemence to reduce a man of his recognized talent, and who was generally anything but timid, to this state of embarrassment? What witty response, what passionate speech could equal the flattery of this poet with bent head and this expression of deep sadness upon his face?

Madame de Bergenheim continued her joking but in a softer tone of voice:

"This time instead of staying in a cabin, the god of poetry has descended to a tavern. Have you not established your general headquarters at La Fauconnerie?"

"How did you know that?" said he.

"By the singular visiting card that you drew in *La Mode*. Do I not know your coat of arms? An expressive one, as my aunt would say.

At these words, which probably referred to some letters, doubtless read without very much anger since they were thus recalled again, Gerfaut took courage.

"Yes," said he, "I am staying at La Fauconnerie; but I cannot stay there any longer, for I think your servants make the tavern their pleasure ground. I must come to some decision. I have two propositions to submit to you; the first is, that you will allow me to see you occasionally; there are numerous promenades about here; you go out alone, so it would be very easy."

"Let us hear the second," said Clemence with a shrug of the shoulders.

"If you will not grant my first, I beg of you to persuade your aunt that she is ill and to take her with you to Plombieres or Baden. The season is not very far advanced; there, at least, I should be able to see you."

"Let us end this folly," said the baroness; "I have listened patiently to you, now, in your turn, listen to me. You will be sensible, will you not? You will leave me and go. You will go to Switzerland, and return to the Montanvert, where you met me for the

first time and which I shall always remember, if you, yourself, do not make it painful for me to do so. You will obey me, Octave, will you not? Give me this proof of your esteem and friendship. You know very well that it is impossible for me to grant what you ask; believe me, it is painful for me to be forced to refuse you. So, say farewell to me; you shall see me again this winter in Paris. Adieu!"

She arose and extended her hand; he took it; but thinking to profit by the emotion betrayed by Madame de Bergenheim's voice, he exclaimed in a sort of transport:

"No! I will not wait until this winter to see you. I was about to submit to your will; if you repulse me I will only consult myself; if you repulse me, Clemence, I warn you that to-morrow I will be in your house, seated at your table and admitted to your drawing-room."

"You?"

"Myself!"

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow."

"And how will you do it, pray?" said she in a defiant tone.

"That is my secret, Madame," replied he coldly.

Although her curiosity was greatly aroused, Clemence felt that it would be beneath her to ask any more questions. She replied with an affectation of mocking indifference:

"Since I am to have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, I hope you will permit me to leave you to-day. You know that I am not well and it is showing me very little attention to allow me to stand here in this wet grass."

She raised her dress a trifle and stuck out her foot showing her slipper which was really covered with a number of pearly drops of rain. Octave threw himself quickly upon his knees and taking a silk handkerchief from his pocket commenced to wipe away all traces of the storm. His action was so rapid that Madame de Bergenheim stood for a moment motionless and speechless; but when she felt her foot imprisoned in the hand of the man who had just declared war against her, her surprise gave place to a mixed feeling of impatience and anger. She drew her foot back with a sudden movement, but unfortunately the foot went one way and the slipper another. A fencing master, who sees his foil carried ten steps away from him by a back stroke, could not feel more astonishment than that felt by Madame de Bergenheim. Her first movement was to place her foot, so singularly undressed, upon the ground; an instinctive horror of the damp muddy walk made her draw it quickly back. She stood thus with one foot lifted; the movement which she had started to make threw her off her balance and as she was about to fall she extended her hand to find some support. This support proved to be Octave's head for he still remained upon his knees. With the usual presumption of lovers, he believed that he had the right to give her the assistance which she seemed to ask for and passed his arm about the slender waist which was bent towards him.

Clemence drew herself up at once and with frowning brow regained her coolness, standing upright upon one foot like Cupid in the painting by Gerard; like it, also, she seemed about to fly away, there was so much airy lightness in her improvised attitude.

Many puerile accidents and ridiculous events occur in life which it would render impossible for the most imperturbable of mandarins to struggle against in order to preserve his gravity. When Louis XIV, this king to expert in courtly ways, dressed his hair alone behind his curtains before presenting himself to the eyes of his courtiers, he feared that this disarray of costume might compromise even his royal majesty. So upon such authority, if one ought to look upon a complete head of hair as indispensable to the dignity of manhood, the same reasoning should exist for the covering of one's feet.

In less than a second, Madame de Bergenheim comprehended that under such circumstances prudish airs would fail of their effect. Meanwhile the agreeable side of her position operated within her, she felt unable to keep up the show of anger that she had wished to assume. The involuntary smile upon her lips smoothed her forehead as a ray of sun dissipates a cloud. Thus, disposed to clemency by reflection or fascination, it was in a very sweet and coaxing voice that she said:

"Octave, give me my slipper."

Gerfaut gazed at the lovely face bent towards him with an expression of childish entreaty, then he glanced with an irresolute air at the trophy which he held in his hand. This slipper, which was as small as Cinderella's, was not green but gray, the lining was of rose colored silk, and the whole was so pretty, coquettish and cunning, that it seemed impossible that its owner could be vexed with him if he examined it closely.

"I will give it back to you," said he at last, "on



condition that you will allow me to put it on for you."

"As to that, certainly not," said she in a sharp tone; "I should much prefer to leave it with you and return home as I am."

Gerfaut shook his head and smiled incredulously

"Think of your delicate lungs and of this terrible mud?"

Clemence drew her foot suddenly back under her dress concealing it entirely from the sight of the young man who gazed at it more than she thought proper. Then, she exclaimed with the obstinacy of a spoiled child:

"Very well! I will return hopping on one foot; I could hop very well when I was young, I ought to be able to do so now."

To give more weight to this observtion she took two little jumps with a grace and sprightliness worthy of Mademoiselle Taglioni.

Octave arose.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing you dance and waltz," said he; "but I admit that I shall be pleased to witness a new dance and one executed for me alone."

As he said these words, he pretended to conceal the innocent object of this dispute in his blouse. The pretty dancer saw by this that a compromise would be necessary. Recourse to concessions is often as fatal to women as to kings; but what can one do when every other exit is closed. Obligated by absolute necessity to accept the conditions imposed upon her, Clemence wished at least to cover this defeat with sufficient dignity and get out of an awkward position with the honors of war.

"Get down upon your knees then," said she in a haughty tone, "and put on my slipper since you exact it, and let this end this ridiculous scene. I think you ought to be too proud to regard a maid's privilege as a favor."

"As a favor which a king would envy," replied Gerfaut in a voice as tender as hers had been disdainful. He put one knee on the ground, placed the little slipper upon the other and seemed to await his enemy's pleasure. But the latter found a new subject for complaint in the pedestal offered her, for she said with increased severity:

"On the ground, Monsieur; and let that end it."

He obeyed, without a reply, after giving her a reproachful glance by which she was as much moved as by his silent obedience. She put out her foot with a more gracious air, and thrust it into the slipper. To be a correct historian, we must admit that this time she left it in the hands which softly pressed it longer than was strictly necessary. When Octave had fastened it with skill but with no haste, he bent his head and pressed his lips to the open work stocking through which he could catch a glimpse of white satiny skin.

"My husband!" exclaimed Madame de Bregenheim, as she heard the clatter of horse's hoofs at the end of the avenue; and without adding a word she fled rapidly toward the chateau. Gerfaut arose from his position no less rapidly and darted into the woods. A rustling of branches which he heard a few steps from him made him uneasy at first, for he feared that an invisible witness had been present at this imprudent interview; but he was soon reassured by the silence which reigned about him.

After the baron and his sister had passed, he crossed the avenue and soon disappeared over the winding road on the other side of the bridge.

CHAPTER V

A league below the castle of Bergenheim, the village of La Fauconnerie was situated, at the junction of several valleys the principal of which, by means of an unfrequented road, opened communications between Lorraine and upper Alsatia. This position had been one of some importance in the middle ages, at the time when the Vosges were beset with partisans from the two countries, always ready to renew border hostilities, the everlasting plague of all frontiers. Upon a cliff overlooking the village were situated the ruins which had given the village its name; it owed it to the birds of prey, [falcons, in French: *faucons*] the habitual guests of the perpendicular rocks. To render proper justice to whom it belongs, we should add, that the proprietors of La Fauconnerie had made it a point at all times to justify this appellation by customs more warlike than hospitable; but, for sometime, the souvenirs of their feudal prowess had slept with their race under the ruins of the manor; the chateau had fallen without the hamlet extending over its ruins; from a *bourg* of some importance La Fauconnerie had come down to a small village, and had nothing remarkable about it but the melancholy ruins of the chateau.

It would be impossible to imagine anything more miserably prosaic than the houses that bordered the road, in rather regular order; their one story with its

thatched roof blackened by rain; the sorry garden surrounded by a little low wall and presenting as vegetables, patches of cabbages and a few rows of beans, gave an idea of the poverty of its inhabitants. Save the church, which the Bishop of Saint-Die had caused to be built and the manse who had naturally shared this fortunate privilege, there was only one house which rose above the condition of a thatched cottage; this was the tavern called *La Femme-sans-Tete*, and kept by Madame Gobillot, an energetic woman who did not resemble, in the least, the name of her establishment, "the Head-less Woman."

A large sign shared with the inevitable bunch of juniper, the honors of decorating the entrance door, and justified an appellation one might have regarded as disrespectful to the fair sex. The original design had been repainted in dazzling colors by the artist, charged with restoring the church. This alliance of the profane with the sacred had, it is true, scandalized the parish priest but he did not dare say a word too much, as Madame Gobillot was one of his most important parishioners. A woman in a rose colored dress and large panniers, standing upon some very high heeled shoes, displayed upon this sign the rejuvenated costume of 1750; an enormous green fan, which she held in her hand entirely concealed her face, and it was through this caprice of the painter that the tavern came to have the name it bore.

At the right of this original figure, was painted, in a very appetizing manner, a pie out of whose crust peeped a trio of woodcock's heads. A little farther on, upon a bed of water cresses, floated a sort of marine monster, carp or sturgeon, trout or crocodile.

The left of the sign was none the less tempting; it represented a roast chicken lying upon its back with its head under its wing, and raising its mutilated legs in the air with a piteous look; it had for its companion a cluster of crabs, of a little too fine a red to have been freshly gathered. The whole was interspersed with bottles and glasses brimful of wine. There were stone jugs at each extremity, the sergeants of the rear-rank of this gastronomic platoon, whose corks had blown out and were still flying in space, while a bubbling white foam issued from their necks and fell majestically over their sides after having described a long parabola. A fallacious sign indeed!

A remorseful conscience, or a desire to protect herself from all reproach of mendacity on the part of the customers, had made the owner of the inn place a wire cupboard upon the sill of one of the windows near the door; in which receptacle were some eggs on a plate, a bit of bread with which David might have loaded his sling, a white glass bottle filled with a liquid of some color, intended to represent cherry wine, but which was in reality only water. This array gave a much more correct idea of the resources of the establishment and formed the menu of an anchorite's repast, and even this, it was difficult for the kitchen's resources to maintain.

A carriage-gate led into the yard and to the stables, cart-drivers being the principal *habitués* of the place; another entrance, the one which was crowned with the fantastic sign, was flanked by two stone seats and opened directly into the kitchen, which also served as parlor for the guests. A fire-place with an enormous mantel, under which a whole family might warm them-

selves, occupied the center of one side of the room, There was a large oven in one corner which opened its huge mouth, the door partly hiding the shovels and tongs employed in its service. Two or three thoroughly smoked hams, suspended from the beams, announced that there was no fear of a famine before the gastronomic massacres of Middlemas. Opposite the window, a large polished oak dresser displayed an array of large flowered plates and little octagon shaped glasses. A huge kitchen kettle and some wooden chairs completed the furniture of the room.

From the kitchen one passed into another room where a permanent table surrounded by benches occupied its entire length. The wall paper, once green, was now a dirty grey; it was embellished by half a dozen black frames representing the story of Prince Poniatowski, who shares the honor of decorating village inns, with Paul and Virginia and Wilhelm Tell. On the upper floor—for this aristocratic dwelling had a second floor—several sleeping-rooms opened upon a long corridor at the end of which was a room with two beds in it. This room was very neat and clean, and destined for any distinguished guests whose unlucky star led them into this deserted country.

That evening, the inn presented an unaccustomed lively appearance; the long seats, each side of the door, were occupied by rustics stripping hemp, by some village lads and three or four cart-drivers smoking short pipes as black as coal. They were listening to two girls who were singing in a most mournful voice a song well known to all in this country:

"Au chateau de Belfort
Il est trois jolies filles," etc.

The light from the hearth, shining through the open door, left this group in the shadow, and concentrated its rays upon a few faces in the interior of the kitchen. First, there was Madame Gobillot in person, wearing a long white apron, and her head covered with an immense cap. She went from oven to dresser, and from dresser to fire-place with a very important air. A fat little servant disappeared frequently through the dining-room door where she seemed to be laying the cover for a first class feast. With that particular dexterity of country girls, she made three trips to carry two plates, and puffed like a porpoise at her work while the frightened look of amazement showed upon her face that every fiber of her intelligence was under unaccustomed tension. Before the fire, and upon the range three or four stew-pans were bubbling. A good looking chicken was turning on the spit, or rather the spit and its victim were turned by a bright-looking boy of about a dozen years, who, with one hand turned the handle and with the other, armed with a large cooking ladle basted the roast.

But the two principal persons in this picture were a young country girl and a young man seated opposite her, who seemed busily engaged in making her portrait. One would easily recognize, from the airs and elegance of the young lady, that she was the daughter of the house, Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot, the one whose passion for fashion plates had excited Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's anger. She sat as straight and rigid upon her stool as a Prussian corporal carrying arms, and maintained an excessively gracious smile upon her lips, while she made her bust more prominent yet by drawing back her shoulders as much as possible.

The young painter, on the contrary, was seated with artistic abandon balancing himself upon a two legged chair with his heels resting against the mantel; he was dressed in a black velvet coat and a very small Tam O'Shanter cap of the same material covered the right side of his head, allowing a luxurious head of brown hair to be seen upon the other side. This head dress, accompanied by long mustaches and a pointed beard merely covering his chin, gave the stranger's face the mediæval look he probably aimed at. This traveling artist was sketching in an album placed upon his knees, and with a freedom which indicated perfect confidence in his own talents. A cigar skilfully held in one corner of his mouth, did not prevent him from warbling between each puff some snatches of Italian airs of which he seemed to possess a complete repertoire. In spite of this triple occupation he sustained a conversation with the ease of a man who, like Caesar, could have dictated to three secretaries at once if necessary.

"Dell 'Assiria, ai semidei

Aspirar——"

"I have already asked you not to purse up your mouth so, Mademoiselle Reine; it gives you a Watteau air radically bourgeois."

"What sort of an air does it give me?" asked she anxiously.

"A Watteau, Regence, Pompadour air—You have a large mouth and we will leave it natural, if you please."

"I have a large mouth!" exclaimed Reine, blushing with anger; "how polite you are!"

And she pinched up her lips until she reduced

them to nearly the size of Montmorency cherries.

"Stop, this vulgar way of judging of art, queen of my heart. Learn that there is nothing more appetizing than a large mouth. I do not care for rose-bud mouths!"

"If it is the fashion!" murmured the young girl in a pleased tone, as she spread out horizontally her vermillion lips which might have extended from ear to ear, not unlike—if we can credit that slanderer, Bussy-Rabutin—the amorous beck of Mademoiselle de la Valière.

"Why did you not let me put on my gold neck-lace? that would have given my portrait a smarter look. Sophie Mitoux had hers painted with a coral comb and ear-rings. How shabby this style is!"

"I beg of you, my good Reine, let me follow my own fancy; an artist is a being of inspiration and spontaneity. Meanwhile, you make your bust too prominent, there is no necessity for you to look as if you had swallowed a whale—

"L'art n'est pas fait pour toi, tu n'en as pas besoin. "Upon my word you have a most astonishing bust; a genuine Rubens."

Madame Gobillot was an austere woman though an inn-keeper, and watched over her daughter with particular care lest any ill sounding or insidious expression should reach her child's ear. Considering the company which frequented the house, the task was not an easy one. So she was shocked at the young man's last words, and although she did not quite understand his meaning, for that very reason she thought she scented a concealed poison more dangerous for Mademoiselle Reine than the awful words used by the

drivers. She dared not however show her displeasure to a customer and one who seemed disposed to spend money freely and, as usual in such circumstances, she vented her displeasure upon the persons immediately under her charge.

"Hurry now! Catherine; will you never finish setting the table? I told you before to put on the Britannia; these gentleman are used to eating with silver. Listen to me, when I am talking to you. Who washed these glasses? What a shame! You are afraid of water as a mad dog. And you! what are you staring at that chicken for, instead of basting it? If you let it burn you shall go to bed without any supper. If it is not provoking!" continued she in a scolding tone visiting her stew-pans one after another, "everything is dried up; a fillet that was as tender as it could be, will be scorched! This is the third time that I have diluted the gravy. Catherine! bring me a dish. Now then, make haste."

"One thing is certain," interrupted the artist, "that Gerfaut is making a fool of me in a first class manner. I do not see what can have become of him. Tell me, Madame Gobillot, are you certain that an amateur of art and the picturesque, traveling at this hour, would not be eaten up by wolves or plundered by robbers in these mountains?"

"Our mountains are safe, Monsieur," replied the land-lady in a tone of offended dignity; "except for the pedlar who was assassinated six months ago and whose body was found in the Combe-aux-Renards—"

"And the driver who was stopped three weeks ago in the Fosse," added Mademoiselle Reine; "the thieves did not quite kill him but he is still in the hospital at Remiremont."

"Oh! that is enough to make one's hair stand on end! This is worse than the forest of Bondy! Truly, if I knew what direction my friend took this morning, I would follow him with my pistols."

"Here is Fritz," said Madame Gobillot, "who met a stranger in the woods who gave him ten sous for telling him the way to Bergenheim. From his description it seems that it must be the gentleman you speak of. Tell us about it, Fritz."

The child related in his Alsatian patois, his meeting of the afternoon, and the artist was convinced that it was Gerfaut he had met.

"He must be wandering in the valley," said he, "dreaming about our play. But did you not say something about Bergenheim? Is there a village near here by that name?"

"There is a chateau of that name, Monsieur, and it is about a league from here as you go up the river."

"And does this chateau happen to belong to the Baron de Bergenheim; a large, blonde, good-looking fellow with rather reddish mustache?"

"That's the picture of its owner, only that the baron does not wear a mustache now, not since he left the service. Do you know him, monsieur?"

"Of course! I know him! Speaking of service, I once rendered him one which was of some account. Is he at the castle?"

"Yes, monsieur, and his lady also."

"Ah! his wife too. She was a Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, of Provence. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty," said Mademoiselle Gobillot pursing up her lips, "that depends upon tastes. If a person likes a face as white as a ghost, she is. And then, she is

so thin! It certainly cannot be very difficult to have a slender waist when one is as thin as that."

"Everybody cannot have rosy cheeks and a form like an enchantress," said the painter in a low voice as he looked at his model in a seductive manner.

"There are some people who think that monsieur's sister is prettier than madame," observed Madame Gobillot.

"Oh! mother, how can you say that?" exclaimed Reine with a disdainful air. "Mademoiselle Aline! A child of fifteen! She certainly is not wanting in color; her hair is such a blonde, such a red rather! It looks as if it were on fire."

"Do not say anything against red hair, I beg of you," said the artist, "it is an eminently artistic shade, which is very popular with the Jews."

"With Jews, it may be so, but with Christians! It seems to me that black hair—"

"When they are long and glossy like yours, they are wonderful," said the young man darting another killing glance. "Madame Gobillot would you mind closing that door? One cannot hear oneself think here. I am a little critical as far as music is concerned, and you have two sopranos outside who deafen me with their shrieks."

"It is Marguerite Mottet and her sister. Since our curé has taken to teaching them they bore us to death coming here and singing their fine songs. One of these days I shall notify them to leave."

As she said these words, Madame Gobillot, went to close the door in order to please her guest; as soon as her back was turned, the latter leaned forward with the boldness of a Lovelace and imprinted a very lov-

ing kiss upon the rosy cheek of Mademoiselle Reine who never thought of drawing back until the offense was committed.

The sole witness to this incident was the little kitchen drudge, whose blue eyes had been fastened upon the artist's mustache and whiskers for some time. They seemed to plunge him into a deep admiration. But at this unexpected event, his amazement was so complete that he dropped his spoon into the ashes.

"Eh! Meinherr, do you wish to go to bed without your supper as has been promised you?" said the young man while the beautiful Reine was trying to recover her countenance. "Now then, sing us a little song instead of staring at me as if I were a giraffe. Your little cook has a nice voice, Madame Gobillot. Now then, Meinherr, give us a little German *lied*. I will give you six kreutzers if you sing in tune and 'a flogging if you grate upon my ears."

He arose and put his album under his arm.

"And my portrait?" exclaimed the young girl whose cheek was still burning from the kiss she had just received.

The painter drew near her smiling and said in a mysterious tone:

"When I make a portrait of a pretty person like you, I never finish it the first day. If you will give me another sitting in the morning before your mother arises, I promise to finish this sketch in a way that will not be displeasing to you."

Mademoiselle Reine saw that her mother was watching her and walked away with no reply save a glance which was not discouraging.

"Now then! You droll little fellow!" exclaimed the artist as he whirled on one foot; "triple time; one, two; commence."

The child burst into an Alsatian song in a high ringing voice.

"Wait a moment. What devilish key are you singing that in?—La, la, la, la; mi, in E major, key of four sharps. By jove, my little man! here is a little fellow who sings B's and C's way up in the clouds; an E sharp, too!" continued he with astonishment, while the singer made a hold upon the key note an octave higher in a voice as clear as crystal.

The artist threw the cigar which he had just lighted into the fire and commenced pacing the kitchen floor paying no more attention to Mademoiselle Reine, who felt a little piqued at seeing herself neglected for a little kitchen drudge.

"A rare voice," said he as he took a great stride; "*per Bacco*, a very rare voice. Added to that he sings very deep; two octaves and a half, a clear ringing tone, the two registers are well united. He would make an admirable *primo musico*. And the little fellow has a pretty face, too; after supper I will make him wash his face, and I will sketch it. I am sure that in less than a year's study, he could make his debut with the greatest success. By jove! I have an idea! Why does not that Gerfaut return? Now then, he would do very well for 'Pippo' in 'La Gazza' or for 'Gemma' in 'Wilhelm Tell.' But we must have a role for him to make his debut in. What subject could we take to properly introduce a child's part? Why does not that d— Gerfaut come? A child, girl or boy; a boy part would be better. Daniel, of course;

viva Daniel! The 'Chaste Suzannah,' opera in three acts. Madame Begrand would be fine as Suzannah. By jove! if Meyerbeer would only take charge of the score! That falls to him by right as a compatriot. Then, that would give him an opportunity to break lances with Mehul and Rossini. If that fool of a Gerfaut would only come! Let us see what would be the three characters; soprano, Suzannah; contralto, David; the old men, two basses; as for the tenor he would be, of course, Suzannah's husband. There would be a superb entrance for him upon his return from the army, 'cavatina guerriera con cori.' Oh! that terrible Gerfaut! the wolves must have devoured him. If he were here, we would knock off the thing between our fruit and cheese."

Just at that moment, the door opened suddenly.

"Is supper ready?" asked a deep toned voice.

"Eh, here he is, the dear friend,

O surprise extrême!

Grand Dieu! c'est lui-même—

alive and in the flesh."

"And hungry," said Gerfaut—as he dropped into a chair near the fire.

"Would you like to compose an opera in three acts, the 'Chaste Suzannah', music by Meyerbeer?"

"I should like some supper first. Madame Gobillot, I beseech you, give me something to eat. Thanks to your mountain air I am about starved."

"But, monsieur; we have been waiting two hours for you," retorted the landlady as she made each stew-pan dance in succession.

"That is a fact," said the artist; "let us go into the dining-room then.

'Gia la mensa e preparata,'

While supping, I will explain my plans to you. I have just found a Daniel in the ashes—"

"My dear Marillac, drop your Daniel and Suzannah," replied Gerfaut as he sat down to the table; "I have something much more important to talk to you about."

CHAPTER VI

While the two friends are devouring to the very last morsel the feast prepared for them by Madame Gobillot, it may not be out of place to explain in a few words the position and nature of the bonds that united these two men.

The Vicomte de Gerfaut was one of those talented beings who are the veritable champions of an age when the lightest pen weighs more in the social balance than our ancestors' heaviest sword. He was born in the south of France, of one of those old families whose fortune had diminished each generation, their name being almost all that they had left. After having made many sacrifices to give their son an education worthy of his birth, his parents did not live to enjoy the fruits of their efforts, and Gerfaut became an orphan at the time when he had just finished his law studies. He then abandoned the career of which his father had dreamed for him and the possibilities of a red gown bordered with ermine. A mobile and highly colored imagination, a passionate love for the arts, and more than all, some intimacies contracted with men of letters decided his vocation and launched him like a lost balloon into literature.

The ardent young man, without a murmur or any misgivings, drank to the very dregs the cup poured out to neophytes, in the harsh career of letters, by

editors, theatrical managers, and publishers. This course ends with some in suicide, but only cost Gerfaut a portion of his slender patrimony; he bore this loss like a man who feels that he is strong enough to repair it. When his plans were once made, he followed them up with indefatigable perseverance, and became a striking example of the irresistible power of intelligence united to will-power. Reputation, for him, lay in the unknown depths of an arid and rocky soil; he was obliged, in order to reach it, to dig a sort of artesian well. Gerfaut accepted this heroic labor; he worked day and night for several years, his forehead, metaphorically, bathed in a painful perspiration wiped only by hopes far away. At last the untiring worker's drill struck the underground spring over which so many noble minds breathlessly bend, although their thirst is never quenched. At this victorious stroke, glory burst forth falling in luminous sparks, and making this new name—his name—flash with a brilliancy too dearly paid for not to be lasting.

At the time we speak of, Octave had conquered every obstacle in the literary field. With a versatility of talent which sometimes recalled Voltaire's 'proteism,' he attacked in succession the most difficult styles. Beside their poetic value, his dramas had this positive merit, the first of all in the theatre world: they were money-makers; so the managers greeted him with due respect, while collaborators swarmed about him. The journals paid their weight in gold for his articles; reviews snatched every line of his yet unfinished novels, his works were illustrated by Porter and Tony Johannot,—the masters of the day—and shone resplendent behind the glass cases in the Or-

leans gallery; Gerfaut had at last made a place for himself among that baker's dozen of writers who call themselves, and justly too, the field marshals of French literature and of which Chateaubriand was then commander-in-chief.

What was it that had brought such a person a hundred leagues from the opera balcony, to put on a pretty woman's slipper? Was the fair one one of those caprices, so frequent and fleeting in artist's thoughts, or had she given birth to one of those setinments that end by absorbing the rest of one's life? That is what we shall learn at the conclusion of this story.

The young man, seated opposite Gerfaut was, physically and morally, as complete a contrast to him as one could possibly imagine. He was one of the kind very much in request in fashionable society. There is not a person who has not met one of these worthy fellows destined to make good officers, perfect merchants and very satisfactory lawyers, but who unfortunately have been seized with a mania for notoriety. Ordinarily they think of it on account of somebody else's talent. This one is brother to a poet, another son-in-law to a historian; they conclude that they also have a right to be poet and historian in their turn. Thomas Corneille is their model; but we must admit that very few of our writers reach the rank attained by Corneille the younger.

Marillac was train-bearer to Gerfaut and was rewarded for this bondage by a few bribes of collaboration, crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. They had been close friends since they both entered the law school, where they were companions in folly, rather than in study. Marillac also had thrown him-

self into the arena of literature; then, different fortunes having greeted the two friends' efforts, he had descended little by little from the role of a rival to that of an inferior. Marillac was an artist, talent accepted, from the tip of his toes, to the sole of his boots, which he wished to lengthen by pointed toes out of respect for the middle ages; for he excelled above all things, in his manner of dressing, and possessed, among other intellectual merits, the longest mustache in literature. If he did not have art itself in his brain, to make up for it, he always had its name at his tongue's end. Vaudeville writing or painting, poetry or music, he dabbled in all of these, like those horses sold as good for both riding and driving who are equally as bad in the saddle as in front of a tilbury. He signed himself: "Marillac, man of letters;" meanwhile, aside from his profound disdain for the *bourgeois* whom he called vulgar, and for the French Academy, which he had sworn never to belong to, one could reproach him with nothing. His penchant for the picturesque in expression was not always, it is true, in the most excellent taste but, in spite of these little oddities, his unfortunate passion for art and his affection for the middle age, he was a brave, worthy and happy fellow, full of good qualities, very much devoted to his friends, above all to Gerfaut. One could therefore pardon him for being an pseudo-artist.

"Will your story be a long one?" said he to the playwright, when Catherine had conducted them after supper to the double bedded room, where they were to pass the night.

"Long or short, what does it matter since you must listen to it?"

"Because, first, I would make some grog and fill my pipe; otherwise I would content myself with a cigar."

"Take your pipe and make your grog."

"Here!" said the artist running after Catherine, "don't rush down stairs so. You are wanted. Fear nothing, interesting maid; you are safe with us; but bring us a couple of glasses, brandy, sugar, a bowl and some hot water."

"They want some hot water," cried the servant rushing into the kitchen with a frightened look, "can they be ill at this hour?"

"Give the gentlemen what they want, you little simpleton," replied Mademoiselle Reine, "they probably want to concoct some of their Paris drinks."

When all the articles necessary for the grog were on the table, Marillac drew up an old arm chair, took another chair to stretch his legs upon, replaced his cap by a handkerchief artistically knotted about his head, his boots by a pair of slippers and, finally, lighted his pipe.

"Now," said he, as he seated himself, "I will listen without moving an eye-lid should your story last, like the creation, six days and nights."

Gerfaut took two or three turns about the room with the air of an orator who is seeking for a beginning to a speech.

"You know," said he, "that Fate has more or less influence over our lives, according to the condition of mind in which we happen to be. In order that you may understand the importance of the adventure I am about relating to you, it will be necessary for me to picture the state of mind which I was in at the time it happened; this will be a sort of philosophical and psychological preamble."

"Thunder!" interrupted Marillac, "if I had known that, I would have ordered a second bowl."

"You will remember," continued Gerfaut paying no attention to this pleasantry, "the pretty bad attack of spleen which I had a little over a year ago?"

"Before your trip to Switzerland?"

"Exactly."

"If I remember rightly," said the artist, "you were strangely cross and whimsical at the time. Was it not just after the failure of our drama at the 'Porte Saint-Martin?'"

"You might also add of our play at the 'Gymnase.'"

"I wash my hands of that. You know very well that it only went as far as the second act, and I did not write one word in the first."

"And scarcely one in the second. However, I take the catastrophe upon my shoulders; that made two perfect failures in that d—d month of August."

"Two failures that were hard to swallow," replied Marillac. "We can say, for our consolation, that there never were more infamous conspiracies against us, above all, that at the 'Gymnase.' My ears ring with the hisses yet! I could see, from our box, a little villain in a dress coat, in one corner of the pit, who gave the signal with a whistle as large as a horse-pistol. How I would have liked to cram it down his throat!" As he said these words he brought his fist down upon the table, and made the glasses and candles dance upon it.

'Conspiracy or not, this time they judged the play aright. I believe it would be impossible to imagine two worse plays; but, as Brid' Oisòn says, "these are things that one admits only to oneself;" it is always

disagreeable to be informed of one's stupidity by an ignorant audience who shout after you like a pack of hounds after a hare. In spite of my pretension of being the least susceptible as regards an author's vanity of all the writers in Paris, it is perfectly impossible to be indifferent to such a thing, a hiss is a hiss. However, vanity aside, there was a question of money which, as I have the bad habit of spending straight along my capital as well as my income, was not without its importance. It was according to my calculation, some sixty thousand francs cut off from my resources and my trip to the East was indefinitely postponed.

"They say, with truth, that misfortunes never come singly. You know Melanie, whom I prevented from making her debut at the Vaudeville, by taking her away from all society, lodging her in a comfortable manner and obliging her to work, I rendered her a valuable service. She was a good girl, and aside from her love for the theatre and a certain indolence that was not without charm, I did not find any fault in her and grew more attached to her every day. Sometimes after spending long hours with her, a fancy for a retired life and domestic happiness, would seize me. Gentlemen with brains are privileged to commit foolish acts at times, and I really do not know what I might have ended by doing, if I had not been preserved from the danger in an unexpected manner.

"One evening, when I arrived at Melanie's, I found the bird had flown. That great ninny of a Ferussac, whom I had never suspected, and had introduced to her myself, had turned her head by making capital out of her love for the stage. As he was about to leave

for Belgium, he persuaded her to go there and dethrone Mademoiselle Provost. I have since learned that a Brussels' banker revenged me by taking this Helene of the stage away from Ferussac. Now she is launched and can fly with her own wings upon the great high way of bravos, flowers, guineas—"

"And wreck and ruin," added Marillac. "Here's to her health!"

"This triple disappointment of pride, money and heart did not cause, I hope you will believe me, the deep state of melancholy into which I soon fell; but the malady manifested itself upon this occasion, for it had been lurking about me for a long time, as the dormant pain of a wound is aroused if one pours a caustic upon its surface.

"There is some dominant power in each individual which is developed at the expense of the other faculties, above all when the profession one chooses suits one's nature. The vital powers thus condensed manifest themselves externally and gush out with an abundance which would become impossible if all the faculties were used alike, and if life filtered away, so to speak. To avoid such destruction, and concentrate life upon one point, in order to increase the action, is the price of talent and individuality. Among athletes, the forehead contracts according as the chest enlarges; with men of thought, it is the brain which causes the other organs to suffer, insatiable vampire, exhausting at times the last drop of blood in the body which serves as its victim. This vampire was my torturer.

"For ten years I had crowded romance upon poetry, vaudeville upon drama, literary criticism upon leader;

I proved, through my own self, in a physical way, the phenomena of the absorption of the senses by intelligence. Many times, after several nights of hard work, the chords of my mind being too violently stretched, they relaxed and gave only indistinct harmony. Then, if I happened to resist this lassitude of nature demanding repose, I felt the pressure of my will exhausting the sources at the very depths of my being. It seemed to me that I dug out my ideas from the bottom of a mine instead of gathering them upon the surface of the brain. The more material organs came to the rescue of their failing chief. The blood from my heart rushed to my head to revive it; the muscles of my limbs communicated to the fibers of the brain their galvanic tension. Nerves turned into imagination, flesh into life. Nothing has developed my materialistic beliefs like this de-carnation of which I had such a sensible, or rather visible preception.

"I destroyed my health with these psychological experiments, and the abuse of work, perhaps shortened my life. When I was thirty years old my face was wrinkled, my cheeks were pallid, and my heart blighted and empty. For what result, grand Dieu! For a fleeting and fruitless renown!

"The failure of my two plays, warned me that others judged me as I judged myself. I recalled to mind the Archbishop of Grenada, and I thought I could hear Gil Blas predicting the failure of my works. We cannot dismiss the public as we can our secretary; meanwhile, I surrendered to a too severe justice in order to decline others' opinions. A horrible thought suddenly came into my mind; my artistic life was ended, I was a worn-out man; in one word, to picture my

situation in a trivial but correct manner, I had reached the end of my rope—

"I could not express to you the discouragement that I felt at this revelation. Melanie's infidelity was the crowning touch. It was not my heart but my vanity which had been rendered more irritable by recent disappointments. This then was the end of all my ambitious dreams! I had not enough mind left, at thirty years of age, to write a vaudeville or to be loved by a grisette!

"One day, Dr. Labanchie came to see me.

"'What are you doing there?' said he, as he saw me seated at my desk.

"'Doctor,' said I, reaching out my hand to him, 'I believe that I am a little feverish.'

"'Your pulse is a little rapid,' said he after making careful examination, 'but your fever is more of imagination than of blood.'

"I explained to him my condition, which was now becoming almost unendurable. Without believing in medicine very much, I had confidence in him and knew him to be a man who would give good advice.

"'You work too much,' said he, shaking his head. 'Your brain is put to too strong a tension. This is a warning nature gives you, and you will make a mistake if you do not follow it. When you are sleepy, you go to bed; when you are tired, you must have rest. It is rest for your brain that you now need. Go into the country, confine yourself to a regular and healthy diet: vegetables, white meat, milk in the morning, a very little wine, but, above all things, no coffee. Take moderate exercise, hunt—and avoid all irritating thoughts; read the *Musee des familles* or the

Magasin Pittoresque. This regime will have the effect of a soothing poultice upon your brain, and before the end of six months you will be in your normal condition again.'

"Six months!' I exclaimed. 'You wretch of a doctor, tell me then to let my beard and nails grow like Nebuchadnezzar. Six months! You do not know how I detest the country, partridges, rabbits and all—For heaven's sake, find some other remedy for me.'

"There is homeopathy,' said he smiling. 'Hahnemann is quite the fashion now.'

"Let us have homeopathy!'

"You know the principles of the system: 'Similia similibus!' If you have a fever, redouble it, if you have the small-pox, be inoculated with a triple dose. As far as you are concerned, you are a little used up and blase, as we all are in this Babylon of ours; have recourse, then, as a remedy, to the very excesses which have brought you into this state. Homeopathize yourself morally. It may cure you, it may kill you; I wash my hands of it.'

"The doctor was joking, I said to myself after he had left. Does he think that passions are like the Wandering Jew's five sous, that there is nothing to do but to put your hand in your pocket and take it out at your convenience when necessary. However this idea, strange as it seemed, struck me forcibly. I decided to try it.

"The next day at seven o'clock in the evening, I was rolling along the road to Lyons. Eight days later, I was rowing in a boat on Lake Geneva. For a long time I had wanted to go to Switzerland it seemed as if I could not have chosen a better time. I hoped

that the fresh mountain air and the soft pure breezes from the lakes would communicate some of their calm serenity to my heart and brain.

"There is something in Parisian life, I do not know what, so exclusive and hardening that it ends by making one irresponsive to sensations of a more simple order.

"My kingdom for the gutter in the rue du Bac! I exclaimed with Madame de Stael from the height of the Coppet terrace. The spectacle of nature only interests contemplative and religious minds powerfully. Mine was neither one nor the other. My habits of analysis and observation made me find more attraction in a characteristic face than in a magnificent landscape; I prefer the exercising of thought to the careless gratification of ecstasy, the study of flesh and soul to earthly horizons, of human passions to a perfectly pure atmosphere.

"I met at Geneva an Englishman, who was as morose as myself. We vented our spleen in common and were both bored together. We traveled thus through the Oberland and the best part of Valais; we were often rolled up in our traveling robes in the depths of the carriage, and fast asleep when the most beautiful points of interest were in sight.

"From Valais we went to Mont-Blanc, and one night we arrived at Chamounix—"

"Did you see any idiots in Valais?" suddenly interrupted Marillac, as he filled his pipe the second time.

"Several, and they were all horrible."

"Do you not think we might compose something with an idiot in it? It might be rather taking."

"It would not equal Caliban or Quasimodo; will

you be so kind as to spare me just now these efforts of imagination, and listen to me, for I am reaching the interesting part of my story."

"God be praised!" said the artist, as he puffed out an enormous cloud of smoke.

"The next day, the Englishman was served with tea in his bed-room, and when I asked him to go to the Mer de glace, he turned his head towards the wall, so, leaving my phlegmatic companion enveloped in bed clothes up to his ears, I started off alone for the Montanvert.

"It was a magnificent morning, and small parties of travelers, some on foot, others mounted, skirted the banks of the Arve or climbed the sides of the mountain. They looked like groups of mice in the distance, and this extreme lessening in size made one comprehend, better than anything else, the immense proportions of the landscape. As for myself I was alone: I had not even taken a guide, this was too favorite a resort for tourist, for the precaution to be necessary. For a wonder, I felt rather gay, with an elasticity of body and mind which I had not felt in some time. I courageously commenced climbing the rough pathway which led to the Mer de glace, aiding myself with a long staff which I had procured at the inn.

At every step I breathed, with renewed pleasure, the fresh pure morning air; I vaguely gazed at the different effects of the sun or mist, at the undulations of the road which sometimes rose almost straight up in the air, sometimes followed a horizontal line, while skirting the open abyss at the right. The Arve, wending its course like a silvery ribbon, seemed at

times to recede, while the ridges of the perpendicular rocks stood out more plainly. At times, the noise of a falling avalanche was repeated, echo after echo.

A troupe of German students below me were responding to the voice of the glaciers by a chorus from "Oberon." Following the turns in the road, I could see through the fir trees or rather at my feet, their long Teutonic frock coats, their blonde beards and caps about the size of one's fist. As I walked along, when the path was not too steep, I amused myself by throwing my stick against the trunks of the trees which bordered the road side; I remember how pleased I was when I succeeded in hitting them, which I admit was not very often.

"In the midst of this innocent amusement, I reached the spot where the reign of the Alpine plants begins. All at once I saw, above me, a rock decked with rhododendrons; these flowers looked like tufts of oleanders through the dark foliage of the fir trees and produced a charming effect. I left the path in order to reach them sooner and when I had gathered a bouquet, I threw my staff and at the same time uttered a joyous cry in imitation of the students, my companions on this trip.

"A frightened scream responded to mine. My staff in its flight had crossed the path and darted into an angle in the road. At that same moment, I saw a mule's head appear with ears thrown back in terror, then the rest of its body, and upon its back a lady ready to fall into the abyss. Fright paralyzed me. All aid was impossible on account of the narrowness of the road and this stranger's life depended upon her coolness and the intelligence of her beast. Finally

the animal seemed to regain its courage and commenced to walk away, lowering its head as if it could still hear the terrible whistle of the javelin in his ears. I slipped from the rock upon which I stood and seized the mule by the bridle and succeeded in getting them out of a bad position; I led the animal in this way, for some distance, until I reached a place where the path was broader and danger was over.

"I then offered my apologies to the person whose life I had just compromised by my imprudence, and for the first time took a good look at her. She was young and well dressed; a black silk dress fitted her slender form to perfection; her straw hat was fastened to the saddle, and her long chestnut hair floated in disorder over her pale cheeks. As she heard my voice, she opened her eyes, which in her fright, she had instinctively closed; they seemed to me the most beautiful I had ever seen in my life.

"She looked at the precipice and turned away with a shudder. Her glance rested upon me, and then upon the rhododendrons which I held in my hand.

"The frightened expression on her face was replaced immediately by one of childish curiosity.

" 'What pretty flowers!' she exclaimed in a fresh young voice; 'are those rhododendrons, monsieur?'

"I presented her my bouquet without replying; as she hesitated about taking it, I said:

" 'If you refuse these flowers, madame, I shall not believe that you have pardoned me. '

"By this time, the persons who were with her had joined us. There were two other ladies, three or four men mounted upon mules, and several guides. At the word rhododendron, a rather large, handsome fel-

low, dressed in a pretentious style, slipped from his mule and climbed the somewhat steep precipice in quest of the flowers which seemed to be so much in favor. When he returned, panting for breath, with an enormous bunch of them in his hand, the lady had already accepted mine.

"'Thanks, Monsieur de Mauleon,'" said she with a rather scornful air; 'offer your flowers to these ladies.' Then, with a slight inclination of the head to me, she truck her mule with her whip and they rode away.

"The rest of the company followed her gazing at me as they passed, the big, fashionable fellow especially giving me a rather impertinent glance. I did not try to pick a quarrel with him on account of this discourteous manifestation. When the cavalcade was at some distance, I went in search of my stick which I found under a tree on the edge of the precipice; then I continued climbing the steep path with my eyes fastened upon the rider in the black silk dress, her hair flying in the wind and my bouquet in her hand.

"A few moments later, I reached the pavillion at the Montanvert, where I found a gay company gathered together, principally made up of English people. As for myself, I must admit the frivolous, or rather mundane bent of my tastes; the truly admirable spectacle presented to my eyes interested me much less than the young stranger, who at this moment was descending with the lightness of a sylph the little road which led to the Mer de glace.

"I do not know what mysterious link bound me to this woman. I had met many much more beautiful, but the sight of them had left me perfectly indifferent.

This one attracted me from the first. The singular circumstances of this first interview doubtless had something to do with the impression. I felt glad to see that she had kept my bouquet, she held it in one hand while she leaned with the other upon a staff, somewhat like my own. The two other ladies, and even the men had stopped on the edge of the ice. Monsieur de Mauleon wished to fulfill his duties as escort, but at the first crevasse he had also halted without manifesting the slightest desire to imitate the chamois. The young woman seemed to take a malicious pleasure in contemplating her admirer's prudent attitude, and far from listening to the advice he gave her, she commenced to run upon the ice, bounding over the crevasses with the aid of her stick. I was admiring her lightness and thoughtlessness, but with an uneasy feeling, when I saw her suddenly stop. I instinctively ran toward her. An enormous crevasse of great depth lay at her feet, blue at its edges and dark in its depths. She stood motionless before this frightful gulf with hands thrown out before her in horror, but charmed like a bird about to be swallowed by a serpent. I knew the irresistible effect upon nervous temperaments of this magnetic attraction towards an abyss. I seized her by the arm, the suddenness of the movement made her drop her staff and flowers which fell into the depths of the chasm.

"I tried to lead her away, but after she had taken a few steps, I felt her totter; she had grown pale; her eyes were closed. I threw my arm about her in order to support her and turned her face towards the north; the cold air striking her face revived her and she soon opened her beautiful brown eyes. I do not know what



sudden tenderness seized me then, but I pressed this lovely creature within my grasp and she remained in my arms unresistingly. I felt that I loved her already.

"She remained for a moment with her languishing eyes fixed on mine making no response, perhaps not even having heard me. The shouts of her party, some of whom were coming towards her, broke the charm. By a rapid movement she withdrew from my embrace, and I offered her my arm, just as if we were in a drawing room, and I was about to lead her out for a dance; she took it but I did not feel elated at this for I could feel her knees waver at every step. The smallest crevasse, which she had crossed before with such agility, now inspired her with a horror which I could divine by the trembling of her arm within mine. I was obliged to make numerous detours in order to avoid them and thus prolonged the distance, for which I was not sorry. Did I not know that when we reached our destination, the world, that other *sea of ice*, was going to take her away from me perhaps forever? We walked silently, occasionally making a few trivial remarks, both deeply embarrassed. When we reached the persons who awaited her, I said, as she disengaged my arm:

"'You dropped my flowers, madame; will it be the same with your memory of me?'"

"She looked at me but made no reply. I loved this silence. I bowed politely to her and returned to the pavilion, while she related her adventure to her friends; but I am quite sure she did not tell *all* the details.

"The register for travelers who visit the Montanvert, is a mixture of all nationalities, and no tourist

refuses his tribute; modest ones write down their names only. I hoped in this way to learn the name of the young traveler and I was not disappointed. I soon saw the copulent Monsieur de Mauleon busily writing his name upon the register in characters worthy of M. Prudhomme; the other members of the little party followed his example. The young woman was the last to write down her name. I took the book in my turn, after she had left, and with apparent composure I read upon the last line these words written in a slender hand writing:

"Baroness Clemence de Bergenheim."

CHAPTER VII

"The Baroness de Bergenheim!" exclaimed Marillac; "ah! I understand it all now, and you may dispense with the remainder of your story. So this was the reason why, instead of visiting the banks of the Rhine as we agreed to, you made me leave the route at Strasbourg under the pretext of walking through the picturesque sites of the Vosges. It was unworthy of you to abuse my confidence as a friend. And I allowed myself to be led by the nose to within a mile of Bergenheim!"

"Peace," interrupted Gerfaut; "I am not finished. Smoke and listen.

"I followed Madame de Bergenheim as far as Geneva. She had gone there from here with her aunt and had availed herself of this journey to visit Mont Blanc. She left for her home the next day without my meeting her again; but I preserved her name, and it was not unknown to me. I had heard it spoken in several houses, in the faubourg Saint-Germain, and I knew that I should certainly have an opportunity of meeting her during the winter.

"So I remained in Geneva yielding to a sensation as new as it was strange. It first acted upon my brain whose ice I felt melting away, and its sources ready to gush forth. I seized my pen with a passion not unlike an access of rage. I finished in four days two acts of a drama that I was then writing. I had never written

anything more vigorous or highly colored. My unconstrained genius throbbed in my arteries, ran through my blood and bubbled over as if it wished to burst forth. My hand could not keep even with the course of my imagination; I was obliged to write in hieroglyphics.

"Adieu to the empty reveries brought about by spleen, and to the meditations *a la Werther*! The sky was blue, the air pure, life delightful—my talent was not dead.

"After this first effort, I slackened a little! Madame de Bergenheim's face, which I had seen but dimly during this short time, returned to me in a less vaporous form; I took extreme delight in calling to mind the slightest circumstances of our meeting, the smallest details of her features, her toilette, her manner of walking and carrying her head. What had impressed me most was the extreme softness of her dark eyes, the almost childish tone of her voice, a vague odor of heliotrope with which her hair was perfumed; also the touch of her hand upon my arm. I sometimes caught myself embracing myself in order to feel this last sensation again, and then I could not help laughing at my thoughts which were worthy of a fifteen years old lover.

"I felt so convinced of my powerlessness to love, that the thought of a serious passion did not at first enter my mind. However, a remembrance of my beautiful traveler pervaded my thoughts more and more, and threatened to usurp the place of everything else. I then subjected myself to a rigid analysis; I sought for the exact location of this sentiment whose involuntary yoke I already felt; I persuaded myself, for some-

time yet, that it was only the transient excitement of my brain, one of those fevers of imagination whose fleeting titillations I had felt more than once. But I soon realized that the evil or the good—for why call love an evil?—had penetrated into the most remote regions of my being and I realized the energy of my struggle like a person entombed who tries to extricate himself. From the ashes of this volcano which I believed to be extinct, a flower had suddenly blossomed, perfumed with the most fragrant of odors and decked with the most charming colors. Artless enthusiasm, faith in love, all the brilliant array of the fresh illusions of my youth returned, as if by enchantment, to greet this new bloom of my life; it seemed to me as if I had been created a second time since I was aided by intelligence and understood its mysteries while testing of its delights. My past, in the presence of this regeneration, was nothing more than a shadow at the bottom of an abyss. I turned towards the future with the faith of a Mussulman who kneels with his face toward the East—I loved!

"I returned to Paris and applied to my friend Casorans who knows the faubourg Saint Germain from Dan to Beersheba.

"*'Madame de Bergenheim,'* he said to me, *'is a very popular society lady, not very pretty, perhaps rather clever though, and very amiable. She is one of our coquettes of the old nobility and with her twenty-four carats virtue she always has two sufferers attached to her chariot, and a third on the waiting list, and yet it is impossible for one to find a word to say against her behavior. Just at this moment, Mauleon and d'Arzenac compose the team; I do not know*

who is on the waiting list. She will probably spend the winter here with her aunt, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, one of the hatefulest old maids on the rue de Varennes. The husband is a good fellow who, since the July revolution, has lived upon his estates, husbanding his forests and killing wild boars without troubling himself much about his wife.'

"He then told me which houses these ladies frequented and left me, saying with a knowing air:

"Look out if you intend to try the power of your seductions upon the little baroness; whoever meddles with her, smarts for it!'

"This information from a viper like Casorans satisfied me in every way. Evidently the place was not taken; impregnable, that was another thing.

"Before Madame de Bergenheim's return, I commenced to assiduously show myself at the houses of which my friend had spoken. My position in the faubourg Saint-Germain is peculiar, but good, according to my opinion. I have enough family ties to be sustained by several should I be attacked by many, and this is the essential point. It is true that, thanks to my works, I am regarded as an atheist and a Jacobin; aside from these two little defects, they think well enough of me. Besides, it is a notorious fact that I have rejected several offers from the present government, and refused last year the *croix d'honneur*; this makes amends and washes away half of my sins. Finally, I have the reputation of having a certain knowledge of heraldry which I owe to my uncle, a confirmed hunter after genealogical claims. This gains me a respect which makes me laugh sometimes when I see people who perfectly detest me, greet me as cor-

dially, as the curé de Saint-Eustache greeted Bayle, for fear that I might destroy their favorite saint. However, in this society, I am no longer Gerfaut of the Porte-Saint-Martin, but I am the Vicomte de Gerfaut. Perhaps, with your *bourgeois* ideas, you do not understand—"

"*Bourgeois!*" exclaimed Marillac bounding from his seat, "what are you talking about? Do you want that we should cut each other's throats before breakfast to-morrow? *Bourgeois!* why not grocer? I am an artist, don't you know that, by this time?"

"Don't get angry, my dear fellow; I meant to say that in certain places the title of vicomte has still a more powerful attraction than you, with your artistic but plebeian, ideas would suppose in this the year of our Lord 1832."

"Well and good. I accept your apology."

"A vicomte's title is a recommendation in the eyes of people who still cling to the baubles of nobility, and all women are of this class. There is something, I know not what, delicate and knightly in this title which suits a youngish bachelor. Duke above all titles, is the one that sounds the best. Moliere and Regnard have done great harm to the title of marquis. Count it terribly *bourgeois*, thanks to the senators of the empire. As to a baron, unless he is called Montmorency or Beaufremont, it is the lowest grade of nobility; vicomte, on the contrary, is above reproach; it exhales a mixed odor of the old regime and young France; then, don't you know, our Chateaubriand was a vicomte.

"I departed from my subject in speaking of nobility. I accidentally turned over one day to the article

upon my family in the *Dictionnaire de Saint-Alilas*; I found that one of my ancestors, Christophe de Gerfaut married in 1569 a Mademoiselle Yolande de Corandeuil.

"O my ancestor! O my ancestress!' I exclaimed, 'you had strange baptismal names; but no matter, I thank you. You are going to serve me as a grappling iron; I shall be very unskilful if at the very first meeting the old aunt escapes Christophe.'

"A few days later, I went to the Marquise de Chameillan's, one of the most exclusive houses in the noble faubourg. When I enter her drawing-room, I usually cause the same sensation that Beelzebub would doubtless produce if he should put his foot into one of the drawing-rooms in Paradise. That evening, when I was announced, I saw a certain undulation of heads in a group of young women who were whispering to each other; many curious eyes were fastened upon me and among these beautiful eyes were two more beautiful than all the others: they were those of my bewitching traveler.

"I exchanged a rapid glance with her, one only; after having paid my respects to the mistress of the house, I mingled with a crowd of men, and entered into conversation with an old peer upon some political question avoiding to look again toward Madame de Bergenheim.

"A moment later, Madame de Chameillan came to ask the peer to play whist; he excused himself, he could not remain late.

"I dare not ask you to play with Mademoiselle de Corandeuil,' said she turning toward me; 'besides, I understand too well that it is to my interest and the

pleasure of these ladies, not to exile you to a whist table."

"I took the card which she half offered me with an eagerness which might have made her suppose that I had become a confirmed whist expert during my voyage.

"Mademoiselle de Corandeuil certainly was the ugly, crabbed creature that Casorans had described; but had she been as frightful as the witches in 'Macbeth' I was determined to make her conquest. So I commenced playing with unusual attention. I was her partner and I knew from experience the profound horror which the loss of money inspires to old maids. Thank heaven, we won. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who has an income of one hundred thousand francs, was not at all indifferent to the gain of two or three louis. It was therefore with an almost gracious air that she congratulated me, as we left the table, upon my manner of playing.

"I would willingly contract an alliance, offensive and defensive with you," said she to me.

"The alliance is already contracted, mademoiselle," said I, seizing the opportunity.

"How is that, monsieur?" replied she, raising her head with a dignified air, as if she were getting ready to repulse some impertinent speech.

"I also gravely straightened up and gave a feudal look to my face.

"Mademoiselle, I have the honor of belonging to your family, a little distantly to be sure; that is what makes me speak of an alliance between us as a thing already concluded. One of my ancestors, Christophe de Gerfaut, married Mademoiselle Yolande de Corandeuil, one of your great grand aunts, in 1569."

"'Yolande really is a family name,' replied the old maid with the most affable smile that her face would admit of; 'I bear it myself. The Corandeuils, monsieur, have never denied their alliances, and it is a pleasure for me to recognize my relationship with such a man as you are. We address by the title of cousin relations as far back as thirteen hundred.'

"'I am nearer related to you by three centuries,' replied I in my most insinuating voice; 'may I hope that this good fortune will authorize me to pay my respects to you?'

"Mademoiselle de Corandeuil replied to my *tartufferie* by granting me permission to call upon her. My attention was not so much absorbed in our conversation that I did not see in a mirror, during this time, the interest with which Madame de Bergenheim watched my conversation with her aunt; but I was careful not to turn around and I let her take her departure without giving her a second glance.

"Three days later, I made my first call. Madame de Bergenheim received my greeting like a woman who had been warned and was therefore prepared. We only exchanged one rapid, earnest glance, that was all. Availing myself of the presence of other callers, numerous enough to assure each one his liberty, I commenced to observe, with a practiced eye, the field whereon I had just taken my position.

"Before the end of the evening, I recognized the correctness of Casorans' information. Among all the gentlemen present I found only two professed admirers: Monsieur de Mauleon, whose insignificance was notorious, and Monsieur d'Arzenac, who appeared at first glance, as if he might be more to be feared. Arzenac,

thanks to an income of ten thousand pounds, beside being a man of rank, also occupies one of the finest positions that one could desire; he is not unworthy of his name and his fortune. Irreproachable in morals as in manners; sufficiently well informed; of an exquisite but reserved politeness; understanding perfectly the ground that he is walking upon; making also more advances than is customary among the pachas of Modern France, he was, without doubt, the flower of the flock in Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's drawing-room. In spite of all these advantages, an attentive examination showed me that his passion was hopeless. Madame de Bergenheim received his attentions very kindly—too kindly. She usually listened to him with a smile in which one could read gratitude for the devotion he lavished upon her. She willingly accepted him as her favorite partner in the galop, which he danced to perfection. His success stopped there.

"At the end of several days, the ground having been carefully explored and the admirers, dangerous and otherwise having been passed in review one after the other, I felt convinced that Clemence loved nobody.

"*'She shall love me,'* said I, on the day I reached this conclusion. In order to formulate in a decisive manner the accomplishment of my desire, I relied upon the following propositions, which are to me articles of faith.

"No woman is unattainable; except when she loves. Thus, a woman who does not love, and who has resisted nine admirers will yield to the tenth.

"The only question for me was to be the tenth. Here the problem to be solved commenced.

"Madame de Bergenheim had only been married

three years; her husband who was good-looking and young, passed for a model of husbands; if these latter considerations were of little importance, the first was of great weight. According to all probability it was too soon for any serious attack. Without being beautiful, she pleased much and many; a second obstacle, since sensibility in women is almost always developed in inverse ratio to their success. She had brains; she was wonderfully aristocratic in all her tastes. Lastly, being very much the fashion, sought after and envied, she was under the special surveillance of pious persons, old maids, retired beauties, in one word, all that feminine mounted police, whose eyes, ears and mouths seem to have assumed the express mission of annoying sensitive hearts while watching over the preservation of good morals.

"This mass of difficulties, none of which escaped me, traced as many lines upon my forehead as if I had been commanded to solve at once all the propositions in Euclid. *She shall love me!* these words flashed unceasingly before my eyes; but the means to attain this end? No satisfactory plan came to me. Women are so capricious, deep and unfathomable! It is, with them, the thing soonest done which is soonest ended! A false step, the least awkwardness, a want of intelligence, a quarter of an hour too soon or too late! One thing only was evident: it needed a grand display of attractions, a complete plan of gallant strategy; but then what more?

"That earthly paradise of the Montanvert was far from us, where I had been able in less time than it would take to walk over a quadrille, to expose her to death, to save her afterwards, and to finally tell her:

'I love you!' Passion in drawing-rooms is not allowed those free, dramatic ways; flowers fade in the candle light; the oppressive atmosphere of balls and fetes stifles the heart, so ready to dilate in pure mountain air; the unexpected and irresistible influence of the glacier would have been improper and foolish in Paris. There, an artless sympathy, stronger than social conventions, had drawn us to each other—Octave and Clemence. Here, she was the Baroness de Bergenheim, and I the Vicomte de Gerfaut. I must from necessity enter the ordinary route, commence the romance at the first page, without knowing how to connect the prologue with it.

"What should be my plan of campaign?

"Should I pose as an agreeable man and try to captivate her attention and good graces by the minute attentions and delicate flattery, which constitute what is classically called paying court? But d'Arzenac had seized this role and filled it in such a superior way that all competition would be unsuccessful. I saw where this had led him. It needed, in order to inflame this heart, a more active spark than foppish gallantry; the latter flatters the vanity without reaching the heart.

"There was the passionate method—ardent, burning, fierce love. There are some women upon whom convulsive sighs drawn from the depths of the stomach, eye-brows frowning in a fantastic manner, and eyes in which only the whites are to be seen and which seem to say: 'Love me or I will kill you!' produce a prodigious effect. I had myself felt the power of this fascination while using it one day upon a soft-hearted blonde creature who thought it delightful to have a

Blue-Beard for a lover. But the drooping corners of Clemence's mouth showed at times an ironical expression which would have cooled down even an Othello's outbursts.

"She has brains, and she knows it," said I to myself; 'shall I attack her in that direction? Women rather like such a little war of words; it gives them an opportunity for displaying a mine of pretty expressions, piquant pouts, fresh bursts of laughter, graceful peculiarities of which they well know the effect. Should I be the Benedict to this Beatrice? But this by-play would hardly fill the prologue and I very much wished to reach the epilogue.

"I passed in review the different routes that a lover might take to reach his end; I recapitulated every one of the more or less infallible methods of conquering female hearts; in a word, I went over my tactic-like a lieutenant about to drill a battalion of recruits. When I had ended I had made no farther advance than before.

"To the devil with systems!" exclaimed I; 'I will not be so foolish as to wilfully adopt the role of roué when I feel called upon to play the plain role of true lover. Let those who like play the part of Lovelace! as for myself I will love; upon the whole, that is what pleases best.' And I jumped headlong into the torrent without troubling myself as to the place of landing.

"While I was thus scheming my attack, Madame de Bergenheim was upon her guard and had prepared her means of defense; puzzled by my reserve which was in singular contrast with my almost extravagant conduct at our first meeting, her woman's intelligence had sur-

mised, on my part, a plan which she proposed to baffle. I was partly found out, but I knew it and thus kept the advantage.

"I could not help but smile at the baroness' clever coquetry, when I decided to follow the inspirations of my heart, instead of choosing selfish motives as my guide. Every time I took her hand when dancing with her, I expected to feel a little claw ready to pierce the cold glove. But while waiting for the scratch it was a very soft velvety little hand that was given me; and I, who willingly lent myself to her deception, did not feel very much duped. It was evident that the sort of halo which my merited or unmerited reputation had thrown over me had made me appear to her as a conquest of some value, a victim upon whom one could lavish just enough flowers in order to bring him to the sacrificial altar. In order to wind the first chain around my neck, Mauleon and d'Arzenac *e tutti quanti* were sacrificed for me without my soliciting, even by a glance, this general disbandment. I could interpret this discharge. I saw that the fair one wished to concentrate all her seductions against me, so as to leave me no means of escape; people neglect the hares to hunt for the deer. You must excuse my conceit.

"This conduct wounded me at first, I afterwards forgave her, when a more careful examination taught me to know this adorable woman's character. Coquetry with her was not a vice of the heart, or of an unscrupulous mind; having nothing better to do, she enjoyed it as a legitimate pastime, without giving it any importance or feeling any scruples. Like all women, she liked to please; her success was sweet for

her vanity; perhaps flattery at times turned her head, but in the midst of this tumult her heart remained in perfect peace. She found so little danger for herself in the game she played that it did not seem to her that it could be very serious for others. Genuine love is not common enough in Parisian parlors for a pretty woman to conceive any great remorse at pleasing without loving.

"Madame de Bergenheim was thus an ingenuously, unsuspiciously, a matchless coquette. Never having loved, not even her husband, she looked upon her little intriguing as upon one of the rights earned on the day of her marriage, the same as her diamonds and cashmeres. There was something touching in the sound of her voice and in her large innocent eyes which she sometimes allowed to rest upon mine, without thinking to turn them away which said: 'I have never loved.' As for myself I believed it all; one is so happy to believe!

"Far from being annoyed at the trap she laid for me, I, on the contrary ran my head into it and presented my forehead to the yoke with a docility which must have amused her, I think; but I hoped not to bear it alone. A coquette who coolly flaunts her triumphs to the world resembles those master-swimmers who, while spectators are admiring the grace of their poses, are struck by an unexpected current; the performer is sometimes swept away and drowned without his elegant strokes being of much service to him. Throw Celimene into the current of genuine passion—I do not mean the brutality of Alceste—I will wager that coquetry will be swept away by love. I had such faith in mine that I thought to be able to fix the

moment when I should call myself victorious and sure of being obeyed.

"You know that sadness and ennui were considered etiquette last winter, in a certain society, which was thrown into mourning by the July revolution. Reunions were very few; there were no balls or soirees; dancing in parlors to the piano was hardly permissible even with intimate friends. When once I was installed in Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's drawing-room upon a friendly footing, this cessation of worldly festivities gave me an opportunity of seeing Clemence in rather an intimate way.

"It would take too long to tell you now all the thousand and one little incidents which compose the history of all passions. Profiting by her coquetry, which made her receive me kindly in order to make me expiate my success afterwards, my love for her was soon an understood thing between us; she listened to me in a mocking way, but did not dispute my right to speak. She ended by receiving my letters after being constrained to do so through a course of strategies in which, truly, I showed incredible invention. I was listened to and she read my letters; I asked for nothing more.

"My love, from the first, had been her secret as well as mine; but I made some unexpected facet of this prism of a thousand colors sparkle every day. Even after having told her a hundred times how much I adored her, my love still had for her the attraction of the unknown. I really had something inexhaustible in my heart and I was sure, in the end, to intoxicate her with this philtre which I constantly poured out and which she drank while making sport of it like a child.

"One day I found her thoughtful and silent. She did not reply to me with her usual sprightliness, during the few moments that I was able to talk with her; the expression of her eyes had changed; there was something deeper and less glowing in their depths; instead of dazzling me by their excessive splendor, as had often happened to me before, they seemed to soften as they rested on mine; she kept her eye-lids a trifle lowered, as if she was tired of being gazed at by me. Her voice, as she spoke, had a low, soft sound, a sort of inexplicable something which came from the very depths of her soul. She had never looked at me with that glance or spoken to me in that tone of voice before. Upon that day, I knew that she loved me.

"I returned to my home unutterably happy, for I loved this woman with a love which I believed myself incapable of.

"When I met Madame de Bergenheim again, I found her completely changed toward me; an icy gravity, an impassible calm, an ironical and disdainful haughtiness had taken the place of the delicious abandon of her former bearing. In spite of my strong determination to allow myself to love with the utmost candor, it was impossible for me to return to that happy age when the frowning brows of the beautiful idol whom we paid court to inspired us right away with the resolve of drowning ourselves. I could not isolate myself from my past experiences. My heart was rejuvenated but my head remained old. I was therefore not in the least discouraged by this change of humor and the fit of anger which it portended.

"Now," said I to myself, 'there is an end to co-

quetry, it is beaten on all sides; it is gone never to return. She has seen that the affair is a little too deep for that and the field not tenable. She is going to erect barriers in order to defend herself and will no longer attack.' We thus pass from the period of amiable smiles, sweet glances and half avowals to that of severity, and prudery, while waiting for the remorse and despair of the denouement. 'I am sure that at this times he called to her help all her powers of resistance. From that day, she would retreat behind the line of duty, conjugal fidelity, honor and all the other fine sentiments which would need numbering after the fashion of Homer. At the first attack, all this household battalion would make a furious sortie; if I succeeded in overthrowing them and taking up my quarters in the trenches, there would then be a gathering of the reserve force, and boiling oil or tar would rain upon my head, representing virtue, religion, heaven and hell."

"A sort of conjugal earthquake," interrupted Marillac.

"I calculated the strength and approximate duration of these means of defense. The whole thing appeared to me only a question of time, a few days or weeks, at most. So long on the husband's account, so long on the father confessor's account. I deserved to be boxed on the ears for my presumption; I was.

"A combat is necessary, in order to secure a victory. In spite of all my efforts and ruses, it was not possible for me to fight this combat; I did not succeed, in spite of all my challenges, in shattering, as I expected, this virtuous conjugal fortress. Madame de Bergenheim still persisted in her systematic reserve, with incredible

prudence and skill. During the remainder of the winter, I did not find more than one opportunity of speaking to her alone. As I was a permanent fixture every evening in her aunt's parlors, she only entered them when there was company; she never went out alone, and in every place where I was likely to meet her, I was sure to find a triple rampart of women erected between us, in the midst of which it was impossible to address one word to her. In short, I was encountering a desperate resistance; and yet, she loved me. I could see her cheeks gradually grow pale; her brilliant eyes often had dark rings beneath them as if sleep had deserted her. Sometimes, when she thought she was not observed, I surprised them fastened upon me; but she immediately turned them away.

"She had been coquettish and indifferent, she was now loving but virtuous.

"Spring came. One afternoon I went to call upon Mademoiselle de Corandeuil who had been ill for several days. I was received, however, probably through some mistake of the servants. As I entered the room I saw Madame de Bergenheim; she was alone at her embroidery, seated upon a divan. There were several vases of flowers in the windows whose curtains only permitted a soft mysterious light to penetrate the room. The perfume from the flowers, the sort of obscurity, the solitude in which I found her, overcame me for a moment; I was obliged to stop in order to quiet the beating of my heart.

"She arose as she heard my name announced; without speaking or laying down her work, she pointed to a chair and seated herself; but instead of obeying her, I fell upon my knees before her and seized her

hands which he did not withdraw. It had been impossible for me to say another word to her before, save 'I love you!' I now told her of all my love. Oh! I am sure of it, my words penetrated to the very depth of her heart, for I felt them burn as they left mine. She listened without interrupting me or making any reply, with her face bent toward me as if she were breathing the perfume of a flower. When I begged her to answer me, when I implored her for one single word from her heart, she withdrew one of her hands imprisoned within mine and placed it upon my forehead, pushing back my head with this gesture familiar to women. She gazed at me thus for a long time; her eyes were so languishing under their long lashes and their languor so penetrating that I closed mine, not being able to endure the fascination of this glance any longer.

"A shiver which ran over her and which went through me also, like an electric shock, aroused me. When I opened my eyes I saw her face bathed in tears. She drew back and repulsed me. I arose impetuously, seated myself by her side and took her in my arms.

"'Am I not a wretched, unhappy woman?' said she, and fell upon my breast sobbing.

"'Madame la comtesse de Pontiviers,' announced the servant, whom I would willingly have assassinated as well as the visiting bore who followed in his footsteps.

"I never saw Madame de Bergenheim in Paris again. I was obliged to go to Bordeaux the next day, on account of a lawsuit, you know all about. Upon my return, at the end of three weeks, I found she had

left. I finally learned that she had come to this place and I followed her. That is the extent of my drama.

"Now you know very well that I have not related this long story to you for the sole pleasure of keeping you awake until one o'clock in the morning. I wanted to explain to you that it was really a serious thing for me, so that you might not refuse to do what I want to ask of you."

"I think I understand what you are aiming at," said Marillac rather pensively.

"You know Bergenheim, you will go to see him to-morrow. He will invite you to pass a few days with him; you will stay to dinner. You will see Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, in whose presence you will speak my name as you refer to our journey; and before night, my venerable cousin of 1569, shall send me an invitation to come and see her."

"I would rather render you any other service than this," replied the artist walking up and down the room in long strides. "I know very well that under all circumstances bachelors ought to triumph over husbands, but that does not prevent my conscience from smiting me. You know that I saved Bergenheim's life?"

"Rest assured that he runs no very great danger at present. Nothing will result from this little step save the little enjoyment I shall take at annoying this cruel creature who defied me to-day. Is it agreed?"

"Since you insist upon it—But then, when our visit is ended, shall we go to work at our drama or upon 'The Chaste Suzannah,' opera in three acts. For really, you neglected art terribly for the sake of your love affairs."

"'The Chaste Suzannah' or the whole Sacred History, we shall put into vaudevilles if you exact it. Until to-morrow then."

"Until to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the drawing-room of the chateau de Bergenheim presented its usual aspect and occupants. The fire on the hearth, lighted during the morning, was slowly dying out and a beautiful autumn sun threw its rays upon the floor through the half opened windows. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, stretched on the couch before the fire-place with Constance at her feet, was reading, according to her habit, the papers which had just arrived. Madame de Bergenheim seemed very busily occupied with a piece of tapestry work placed in her lap; but the slow manner in which her needle moved, and the singular mistakes she made, showed that her mind was far away from the flowers she was working upon. She had just finished a beautiful dark lily, which contrasted strangely with its neighbors, when a servant entered.

"Madame," said he, "there is a person here enquiring for M. le Baron de Bergenheim."

"Is Monsieur de Bergenheim not at home?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"Monsieur has gone to ride with Mademoiselle Aline."

"Who is this person?"

"It is a gentleman; but I did not ask his name."

"Let him enter."

Clemence arose at the servant's first words and threw her work upon a chair making a movement as

if to leave the room; but after a moment's reflection, she resumed her seat and her work apparently indifferent as to who was to enter.

"Monsieur de Marillac," announced the lackey, as he opened the door a second time.

Madame de Bergenheim darted a rapid glance at the individual who presented himself and then breathed freely again.

After having set to rights his coiffure *a la Perinet*, the artist entered the room throwing back his shoulders. Tightly buttoned up in his traveling redingote and balancing with ease a small gray hat, he respectfully bowed to the two ladies and then assumed a pose *a la Van Dyke*.

Constance was so frightened at the sight of this imposing figure that instead of jumping at the newcomer's legs as was her custom, she sheltered herself under her mistress' chair uttering low growls; at first glance the latter shared, if not the terror, at least the aversion of her dog. Among her numerous antipathies, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil detested a beard. A common sentiment with all old maids who barely tolerated mustaches; "Gentlemen did not wear them in 1780," they would say.

Marillac's eyes turned involuntarily toward the portraits and other picturesque details of a room which was worthy the attention of a connoisseur; but he felt that the moment was not opportune for indulging in an artistic contemplation and that he must leave the dead for the living.

"Ladies," said he, "I ought, first of all, to ask your pardon for thus intruding without having had the honor of an introduction. I hoped to find here M. de

Bergenheim, with whom I am on very intimate terms. I was told that he was at the chateau."

"My husband's friends do not need to be presented at his house," said Clemence; "M. de Bergenheim will return soon probably." And with a gracious gesture she motioned the visitor to a seat.

"Your name is not unknown to me," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil in her turn, after having succeeded in calming Constance's agitation: "I remember having heard M. de Bergenheim mention you often."

"We were at college together, although I am a few years younger than Christian."

"But," exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim struck by some sudden thought, "there is more than a college friendship between you. Are you not, monsieur, the person who saved my husband's life in 1830?"

Marillac smiled, bowed his head and seated himself. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil herself could not but graciously greet her nephew's preserver, had he had a mustache as long as the Shah of Persia, who ties his in a bow behind his neck.

After the exchange of a few compliments, Madame de Bergenheim with the amiability of a mistress of the house who seeks subjects of conversation which show off to the best advantage the persons she receives, continued:

"My husband does not like to talk of himself and has never told us the details of this adventure in which he ran such great danger. Will you be kind enough to gratify our curiosity on this point?"

Marillac, among his other pretensions, had that of being able to relate a story in an impressive manner. These words were as pleasing to his ears as the re-

quest for a song is to a lady who requires urging although she is dying to sing.

"Ladies," said he crossing one leg over the other and leaning upon one arm of his chair, "it was on the 28th of July, 1830; the disastrous decrees had produced their effects; the volcano which—"

"Pardon me, monsieur, if I interrupt you," said Mademoiselle de Coandeuil quickly; "according to my opinion and that of many others, the royal decrees you speak of were good and necessary. Charles X.'s only mistake was not to have fifty thousand men around Paris to force their acceptance. I am only a woman, monsieur, but if I had had twenty cannons upon the quais and as many upon the boulevards under my command, I promise you that your tricolored flag should never have floated over the Tuilleries."

"Pitt and Cobourg!" said the artist between his teeth as with an astonished air he gazed at the old maid; but his common sense told him that republicanism was not acceptable within this castle. Besides, thinking of the mission he was charged with, he did not think his conscience would feel much hurt if he made a little concession of principles and manoeuvred diplomatically.

"Madame," replied he, "I call the decrees disastrous when I think of their result. You will certainly admit that our situation to-day ought to make everybody regret the causes which brought it about."

"We are exactly of the same opinion as regards that point, monsieur," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil resuming her serenity.

"The open volcano beneath our feet," continued Marillac who still stuck to his point, "preluded by

deep rumblings of the hot lava which was about gushing forth. The excitement of the people was intense. Several engagements with the soldiers had already taken place at different points. I stood on the Boulevard Poissonniere, where I had just taken my luncheon and was gazing with an artist's eye upon the dramatic scene spread out before me. Men with bare arms and women panting with excitement were tearing up the pavements or felling trees. An omnibus had just been upset; the rioters added cabriolets, furniture and casks to it; everything became means of defense. The crashing of the trees as they fell, the blows of crowbars on the stones, the confused roaring of thousands of voices, the Marseillaise sung in chorus, and the irregular cannonading which resounded from the direction of the rue Saint-Denis, all composed a strident, stupefying, tempestuous harmony, beside which Beethoven's 'Tempest' would have seemed like the buzzing of a bee.

"I was listening to the roaring of the people who were gnawing at their chains, before breaking them, when my eyes happened to fall upon a window of a second floor apartment opposite me. A man of about sixty years of age with grey hair, a fresh, plump face, an honest, placid countenance and wearing a mouse-colored silk dressing gown was seated before a small round table. The window opened down to the floor and I could see him in this frame like a full length portrait. There was a bowl of coffee upon the table in which he dipped his roll as he read his paper. I beg your pardon, ladies, for entering into these petty details but the habit of writing—"

"I assure you, monsieur, your story interests me

very much," said Madame de Bergenheim kindly.

"A King Charles spaniel, like yours, mademoiselle, was standing near the window with his paws resting upon it; he was gazing with curiosity at the revolution of July, while his master was reading his paper and sipping his coffee as indifferent to all that passed as if he had been in Pekin or New York.

"O the calm of a pure sincere soul!' I exclaimed to myself at the sight of this little tableau worthy of Greuze; 'O patriarchal philosophy! in a few moments perhaps blood will flow in the streets and here sits a handsome old man quietly sipping his coffee.' He seemed like a lamb browsing upon a volcano."

Marillac loved volcanoes and never lost an opportunity to bring one in at every possible opportunity.

"Suddenly a commotion ran through the crowd; they rushed in every direction and in an instant the boulevard was empty. Plumes waving from high caps, red and white flags floating from the ends of long lances and the cavalcade that I saw approach through the trees told me the cause of this panic. A squadron of lancers was charging. Have you ever seen a charge of lancers?"

"Never!" said both of the ladies at once.

"It is a very grand sight, I assure you. Fancy, ladies, a legion of demons galloping along upon their horses thrusting to the right and left with long pikes, whose steel-points are eighteen inches long. That is a charge of lancers. I beg you to believe that I had shown before this the mettle there was in me, but I will not conceal from you that at this moment I shared the impression which the coming of these gentlemen made upon the crowd. I only had time to jump over

the sidewalk and to dart up a staircase which ran on the outside of a house, every door being closed. I shall never forget the face of one of these men who thrust the point of a lance at me, long enough to pierce through six men at once. I admit that I felt excited then! The djinns having passed—

"The—what?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil who was not familiar with Eastern terms.

"I beg a thousand pardons, it was a poetical reminiscence. The lancers, having rushed through the boulevard like an avalanche, a laggard rider, a hundred steps behind the others, galloped proudly by erect in his stirrups and flourishing his sword. Suddenly the report of a gun resounded, the lancer reeled backward, then forward and finally fell upon his horse's neck; a moment later he turned in his saddle and lay stretched upon the ground, his foot caught in the stirrup; the horse still galloping, dragged the man and the lance which was fastened to his arm by a leather band."

"How horrible!" said Clemence clasping her hands.

Marillac, much pleased with the effect of his narration, leaned back in his chair and continued his tale with his usual assurance.

"I looked to the neighboring roofs to discover whence came this shot; as I was glancing to the right and left I saw smoke issuing through the blinds of the room on the second floor which had been closed at the approach of the lancers.

"'Good God!'" I exclaimed; 'it must be this handsome old man in the mouse-colored silk dressing-gown who amuses himself firing upon the lancers as if they were rabbits in a warren!'

"Just then the blinds were opened and the strange fellow with the unruffled countenance leaned out and gazed with a smiling face in the direction the horse was taking, dragging his master's body after him. The partriarch had killed his man between two sips of his coffee."

"And that is the cowardly way the royal guard were assassinated by the 'heroes' of your glorious insurrection!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil indignantly.

"When the troops had passed," Marillac continued, "the crowd returned more excited and noisy than ever. Barricades were erected with wonderful rapidity, there were two of those together on the boulevard close to where I was. I saw a horseman suddenly bound over the first, he wore a tuft of red and white feathers in his hat. I saw that it was a staff officer doubtless carrying some despatch to headquarters. He continued his way, sabre in its sheath, head erect, proud and calm in the midst of insulting shouts from the crowd; stones were thrown at him and sticks at his horse's legs; he looked as if he were parading upon the Carrousel Square.

"When he reached the second barricade, he drew his horse up as if it were merely a question of jumping a hurdle in a steeple chase. Just then I saw the window on the first floor open again. 'Ah! you old rascal!' I exclaimed. The report of a gun drowned my voice; the horse which had just made the leap, fell on his knees; the horseman tried to pull him up, but after making one effort he fell over upon his side. The ball had gone through the steed's head.

"It was that poor Fidele that I gave your husband,"

said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil who was always very sentimental in the choice of the names she gave animals.

"He merited his name, mademoiselle, for the poor beast died for his master, for whom the shot was intended. Several of those horrible faces which upon riot days suddenly appear as if they came out of the ground, darted toward the unhorsed officer. I, and several other young men who were as little disposed as I was to allow a defenceless man to be slaughtered, ran toward him. I recognized Christian as I approached, his right leg was caught under the horse and he was trying to unsheath his sword with his left hand. Sticks and stones were showered at him. I drew out the sword, which his position prevented him from doing, and exclaimed as I waved it in the air: 'The first rascal who advances, I will cut open like a dog.'

"I accompanied these words with a flourish which kept the cannibals at a distance for the time being.

"The young fellows who were with me followed my example. One took a pickaxe, another seized the branch of a tree, while others tried to release Christian from his horse. During this time, the crowd increased around us; the shouts redoubled: 'Down with the ordinances!—These are disguised gendarmes *Vive la liberte!*—We must kill them! Let's hang the spies to the lamp-posts!'

"Danger was imminent and I realized that only a patriotic harangue would get us out of the scrape. While they were releasing Christian, I jumped upon Fidele so as to be seen by all and shouted:

"*'Vive la liberte!'*"

"*Vive la liberte!*" replied the crowd.

"Down with Charles X! down with the ministers! down with the ordinances!"

"Down!" shouted a thousand voices at once.

"You understand, ladies, this was a sort of bait, intended to close the mouths of these brutes.

"We are all citizens, we are all Frenchmen," I continued; "we must not soil our hands with the blood of one of our disarmed brothers. After a victory, there are no enemies. This officer was doing his duty in fulfilling his chief's commands; let us do ours by dying, if necessary, for our country and the preservation of our rights."

"Vive la liberte! vive la liberte!" shouted the crowd. He is right; the officer was doing his duty. It would be assassination!" exclaimed numerous voices.

"Thanks, Marillac," said Bergenheim to me, as I took his hand to lead him away availing ourselves of the effect of my harangue; "but do not press me so hard, for I really believe that my right arm is broken; only for that I should ask you to return me my sword that I might show this rabble that they cannot kill a Bergenheim as they would a chicken."

"Let him cry: vive la Chartre!" roared out a man with a ferocious face.

"I receive orders from nobody," replied Christian in a very loud voice, as he glared at him with eyes which would have put a rhinoceros to flight."

"Your husband is really a very brave man," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, addressing Clemence.

"Brave as an old warrior. This time he pushed his courage to the verge of imprudence; I do not know what the result might not have been if the crowd had

not been dispersed a second time by the approach of the lancers who were returning through the boulevard. I led Bergenheim into a café; fortunately his arm was only sprained."

Just at this moment, Marillac's story was interrupted by a sound of voices and hurried steps. The door suddenly opened and Aline burst into the room with her usual impetuosity.

"What has happened to you, Aline?" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, hurrying to her sister's side. The young girl's riding habit and hat were covered with splashes of mud.

"Oh, nothing," replied the young girl in a broken voice; "it was only Titania who wanted to throw me into the river. Do you know where Rousselet is? They say it is necessary to bleed him; and he is the only one who knows how to do it."

"Whom do you mean, child? Is my husband wounded?" asked Clemence turning pale.

"No, not Christian; it is a gentleman I do not know; only for him I should have been drowned. Mon Dieu! cannot Rousselet be found?"

Aline left the room in great agitation. They all went over to the windows which opened out into the court whence the sound of voices seemed to arise and where they could hear the master's voice thundering out his commands. Several servants had gone to his assistance: one of them held Titania by the bridle; she was covered with foam and mud, and was trembling, with distended nostrils, like a beast that knows it has just committed a wicked action. A young man was seated upon a stone bench wiping away blood which streamed from his forehead. It was Monsieur de Gerfaut.

At this sight, Clemence supported herself against the frame work of the window and Marillac hurriedly left the room.

Pere Rousselet, who had at last been found in the kitchen, majestically advanced, eating an enormous slice of bread and butter.

"Good heavens, have you arrived at last!" exclaimed Bergenheim. "Here is a gentleman this crazy mare has thrown against a tree and who has received a violent blow on the head. Do you not think it would be the proper thing to bleed him?"

"A slight phlebotomy might be very advantageous in stopping the extravasation of blood in the frontal region," replied the peasant, calling to his aid all of the technical terms that he had learned when a hospital nurse.

"Are you sure you can do this bleeding well?"

"I'll take the liberty of saying to M. le baron that I phlebotomized Perdreau last week and Mascareau only a month ago without there being any complaint from them."

"Indeed! I believe you," sneered the groom, "they are both on their last legs."

"I am neither Perdreau nor Mascareau," observed the wounded man with a smile.

Rousselet drew himself up at full height with the dignity of a man of talent who scorns to reply to either criticism or mistrust.

"Monsieur," said Gerfaut turning to the baron, "I am really causing you too much trouble. This trifle does not merit the attention you give it. I do not suffer in the least. Some water and a napkin are all that I need. I fancy that I resemble an Iroquois who

has been scalped just now; my pride is really what is most hurt," he added with a smile, "when I think of the grotesque sight I must present to the ladies whom I notice at the window."

"Why, it is M. de Gerfaut!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil toward whom he had raised his eyes.

Octave bowed to her with a gracious air. His glance wandered from the old maid to Clemence, who did not seem to have the strength to leave the window. M. de Bergenheim, after hurriedly greeting Marillac, finally yielded to the assurance that a surgeon was unnecessary and conducted the two friends to his own room where the wounded man could find everything that he needed.

"What the devil was the use in sending me as ambassador since you were to make such a fine entrance upon the stage?" murmured Marillac in his friend's ear.

"Silence!" replied the latter as he pressed his hand; "I am only behind the scenes yet."

During this time Clemence and her aunt had led Aline to her room.

"Now tell us what all this means?" said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil while the young girl was changing her dress.

"It was Christian's fault," replied Aline. "We were galloping along beside the river when Titania became frightened by the branch of a tree. 'Do not be afraid,' exclaims my brother to me. I was not in the least frightened; but when he saw that my horse was about running away, he urged his on in order to join me. When Titania heard the galloping behind her she did run away for good; she left the road and started straight for the river. Then I commenced to be a

little frightened. Just fancy, Clemence, I bounded in the saddle at each leap, sometimes upon the mare's neck, sometimes upon the crupper; it was terrible! I tried to withdraw my foot from the stirrup as Christian had told me to do; but just then Titania ran against the trunk of a tree and I rolled over with her. A gentleman, whom I had not seen before and who, I believe, actually jumped out of the ground, raised me from the saddle where I was held by something, I do not know what; then that horrid Titania threw him against the tree as he was helping me to my feet and when I was able to look at him his face was covered with blood. Christian rushed on the scene, and when he saw that I was not badly hurt he ran after Titania and beat her! Oh! how he beat her! Mon Dieu! how cruel men are! It was in vain for me to cry for mercy, he would not listen to me. Then we came home and, since this gentleman is not badly wounded, it seems that my poor dress has fared the worst."

The young girl took her riding habit from the chair as she said these words and could not restrain a cry of horror when she saw an enormous rent in it.

"Mon Dieu!" she exclaimed as she showed it to her sister-in-law. It was all that she had strength to articulate.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil took the dress in her turn and looked at it with the practiced eye of a person who had made a special study of little disasters of the toilet and the ways of remedying them.

"It is in the fulness," said she, "and by putting in a new breadth it will never be seen."

Aline once convinced that the evil could be repaired soon recovered her serenity.

When the three ladies entered the drawing-room they found the baron and his two guests chatting amicably. Gerfaut had his forehead tied up with a black silk band which gave him a slight resemblance to Cupid with his bandage just off his eyes. His sparkling look showed that blindness was not what there was in common between him and the charming little god. After the first greetings, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was always strict as to etiquette, and who thought that Titania had been rather an uncere-monious master of ceremonies between her nephew and M. de Gerfaut, advanced toward the latter in order to regularly introduce them to each other.

"I do not think," said she, "that M. de Bergenheim has had the honor of meeting you before to-day; allow me then to present you to him. Baron, this is M. le Vicomte de Gerfaut, one of my relatives."

When Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was in good humor she treated Gerfaut as a relative on account of their family alliance of 1569. At this moment the poet felt profoundly grateful for this kindness.

"Monsieur has presented himself so well," said Christian frankly, "that your recommendation, my dear aunt, in spite of the respect I have for it, will not add to my gratitude. Only for M. de Gerfaut, here is a mad-cap little girl whom we should be obliged to look for now at the bottom of the river."

As he said these words, he passed his arm about his sister's waist and kissed her tenderly while Aline was obliged to stand upon the tips of her toes to reach her brother's mouth.

"These gentlemen," continued he, "have agreed to sacrifice for us the pleasure of the "Femme-sans-Tête,"

as well as Mademoiselle Gobillot's civilities, and establish their headquarters in my house. They can pursue their picturesque and romantic studies from here just as well; I suppose, Marillac, that you are still a determined dauber of canvass?"

"To tell the truth," replied the poet, "art absorbs me a great deal."

"As to myself, I never succeeded in drawing a nose that did not resemble an ear and vice versa. But for that worthy Baringnier who was kind enough to look over my plans I ran a great risk of leaving Saint Cyr without a graduating diploma. But seriously, gentlemen, when you are tired of sketching trees and tumble-down houses, I can give you some good boar hunting. Are you a hunter, Monsieur de Gerfaut?"

"I like hunting very much," replied the lover with rare effrontery.

The conversation continued thus upon the topics that occupy people who meet for the first time. When the baron spoke of the two friends installing themselves at the chateau, Octave darted a glance at Madame de Bergenheim as if soliciting a tacit approbation of his conduct; but met with no response. Clemence, with a gloomy, somber air fulfilled the duties that politeness imposed upon her as mistress of the house. Her conduct did not change during the rest of the evening, and Gerfaut no longer tried by a single glance to soften the severity she seemed determined to adopt toward him. All his attentions were reserved for Mademoiselle de Corandeuil and Aline, who listened with unconcealed pleasure to the man whom she regarded as her savior; for the remembrance of the danger which the young girl had run, excited her more and more.

After supper Mademoiselle de Corandeuil proposed a game of whist to M. de Gerfaut whose talent for the game had made a lasting impression upon her. The poet accepted this diversion with an enthusiasm equal to that he had shown for hunting and quite as truthful too. Christian and his sister—a little gamester in embryo like all of her family—completed the party, while Clémence took up her work and listened with absent-minded air to Marillac's conversation. It was in vain for the latter to call art and the middle ages to his aid, using the very quintessence of his brightest speeches, success did not attend his effort. After the end of an hour, he had a firm conviction that Madame de Bergenheim was, everything considered, only a woman of ordinary intelligence and entirely unworthy the passion she had inspired in his friend.

"Upon my soul," he thought, "I would a hundred times rather have Reine Gobillot for a sweetheart. I must take a trip in that direction to-morrow."

When they separated for the night, Gerfaut, bored by his evening and wounded by his reception from Clémence, which, he thought, surpassed anything he could have expected of her capricious disposition, addressed the young woman a profound bow and a look which said:

"I am here in spite of you; I shall stay here in spite of you; you shall love me in spite of yourself."

Madame de Bergenheim replied by a glance none the less expressive, in which a lover the most prone to conceit could read:

"Do as you like; I have as much indifference for your love as disdain for your presumption."

This was the last shot in this preliminary skirmish.

CHAPTER IX.

There are some women, who, like the heroic curé Merino, need but one hour's sleep. A nervous, irritable, subtle organization gives them a power for waking without apparent fatigue, refused to most men. And yet, when a strong emotion causes its corrosive waters to filtrate into the veins of these impressionable beings, it trickles there drop by drop, until it has hollowed out in the very depths of their hearts a lake full of trouble and storms. Then, in the silence of the night and the calm of solitude, insomnia makes the rosy cheeks grow pale and dark rings encircle the most sparkling eyes. It is in vain for the burning forehead to seek the cool pillow; the pillow grows warm without the forehead cooling. In vain the mind hunts for common place ideas, as a sort of intellectual poppy-leaves that may lead to a quiet night's rest; a persistent thought still returns chasing away all others as an eagle disperses a flock of timid birds in order to remain sole master of its prey. If one tries to repeat the accustomed prayer and invoke the aid of the Virgin or the good angel who watches at the foot of young girls' beds, in order to keep away the charms of the tempter, the prayer is only on the lips, the Virgin is deaf, the angel sleeps! The breath of passion against which one struggle runs through every fiber of the heart like a storm over the chords of an Aeolian harp, and extorts from it those magic melodies which

a poor, troubled and frightened woman listens to with remorse and despair; but to which she listens, and at last becomes intoxicated with, for the allegory of Eve is an immortal myth, that goes repeating itself, through every century and every clime.

Since her entrance into society, Madame de Bergenheim had formed the habit of keeping late hours. When the minute details of her toilet for the night were over, and she has confided her beautiful body to the snowy sheets of her couch, some new novel or fashionable magazine helped her while away the time until sleep came to her. Christian left his room, like a good country gentleman, at sunrise; he left it either for the chase or to oversee workmen who were constantly being employed upon some part of his domain. Ordinarily, he returned only in time for dinner and rarely saw Clemence except between that time and supper, at the conclusion of which, fatigued by his days' work, he hastened to seek the repose of the just. The husband and wife, while living under the same roof, were thus completely isolated from each other; night for one was almost day for the other.

By the haste with which Clemence shortened her preparations for the night, one would have said that she must have been blessed with an unusual sleepy sensation. But when she lay in bed with her head under her arm like a swan with his neck under his wing, and almost in the attitude of Correggio's Madeleine, her eyes, which sparkled with a feverish light, betrayed the fact that she had sought the solitude of her bed in order to indulge more freely in deep meditation.

With marvelous fidelity she went over the slightest

events of the day, to which by a constant effort of will-power, she had seemed so indifferent. First, she saw Gerfaut with his face covered with blood, and the thought of the terrible sensation which this sight caused her, made her heart throb violently. She then recalled him as she next saw him in the parlor by her husband's side, seated in the very chair that she had left but a moment before. This trifling circumstance impressed her; she saw in this a proof of sympathetic understanding, a sort of gift of second sight which Octave possessed and which in her eyes was such a formidable weapon. According to her ideas he must have suspected that this was her own favorite chair and have seized it for that reason, just as he would have loved to take her in his arms.

For the first time, Clemence had seen together the man to whom she belonged and the man whom she regarded somewhat as her property. For, by one of those arrangements with their consciences which women alone possess the secret of, she had managed to reason like this: "Since I am certain to always belong to M. de Bergenheim only, Octave can certainly belong to me." An heterodoxical syllogism whose two propositions she reconciled with inconceivable subtlety. A feeling of shame had made her dread this meeting which the most hardened coquette could never witness without embarrassment. A woman, between her husband and lover, is like a plant one sprinkles with ice-cold water while a ray of sunlight is trying to comfort it. The somber and jealous, or even tranquil and unsuspecting, face of a husband has a wonderful power of repression. One is embarrassed to love under the glance of an eye that darts flashes as bright as steel;

and a calm kindly look is more terrible yet, for all jealousy seems tyrannical and tyranny leads to revolt; but a confiding husband is like a victim strangled in his sleep and inspires, by his very calmness, the most poignant remorse.

The meeting of these two men naturally led Clemence to a comparison which could but be to Christian's advantage. Gerfaut had nothing remarkable about him save an intelligent, intensely clever air; there was a thoughtful look in his eyes and an archness in his smile, but his irregular features showed no mark of beauty; his face wore an habitually tired expression peculiar to those people who have lived a great deal in a short time, and it made him look older than Christian although he was really some years younger. The latter, on the contrary, owed to his strong constitution fortified by country life, an appearance of blooming youth that enhanced his noble regularity of features. In a word, he was infinitely better looking than his rival, and Clemence exaggerated her husband's superiority over her lover. Not being able to find the latter awkward or insignificant, she tried to persuade herself that he was ugly. She then reviewed in her mind all of M. de Bergenheim's good qualities, his attachment and kindness to her, his loyal, generous ways; she recalled the striking instance that Marillac had related of his bravery, a quality without which there is no hope of success for a man in the eyes of any woman. She did all in her power to inflame her imagination and see in her husband a hero worthy of inspiring the most fervent love. When she had exhausted her efforts toward such enthusiasm and admiration, she turned round, in utter despair, and

burying her head in her pillow, she sobbed:
"I cannot, I cannot love him!"

She wept bitterly for a long while. As she recalled her own severity in the past as regarded women whose conduct had caused scandal, she employed in her turn the harshness of her judgment in examining her own actions. She felt herself more guilty than all the others, for her weakness appeared less excusable to her. She felt that she was unworthy and contemptible, and wished to die that she might escape the shame which made her blush scarlet and the remorse which tortured her soul.

How many such unhappy tears bathe the eyes of those who should only shed tears of joy! How many such sighs break the silence of the night! There are noble, celestial beings among women whom remorse stretches out upon its relentless brasier, but in the midst of the flames that torture them, the heart palpitates, imperishable as a salamander. Is it not human fate to suffer? After Madame de Bergenheim had given vent by convulsive sobs and stifled sighs, to her grief for this love which she could not tear from her breast, she formed a desperate resolution. From the manner in which M. de Gerfaut had taken possession of the chateau the very first day, she recognized that he was master of the situation. The sort of infatuation which Mademoiselle de Corandeuil seemed to have for him, and Christian's courteous and hospitable habits would give him an opportunity to prolong his stay as long as he desired. She thus compared herself to a besieged general who sees the enemy within his ramparts.

"Very well! I will shut myself up in the fortress!"

said she, smiling in spite of herself in the midst of her tears. "Since this insupportable man has taken possession of my drawing-room, I will remain in my own room; we will see if he dares to approach that!"

She shook her pretty head with a defiant air but she could not help glancing into the room which was barely lighted with a night lamp. She sat up and listened for a moment rather anxiously as if Octave's dark eyes might suddenly glisten in the obscurity. When she had assured herself that all was tranquil and that the throbbing of her heart was all that disturbed the silence, she continued preparing her plan of defense.

She decided that she would be ill the next day and keep to her bed, if necessary, until her persecutor should make up his mind to beat a retreat. She solemnly pledged herself to be firm, courageous and inflexible; then she tried to pray. It was now two o'clock in the morning. For some time, Clemence remained motionless and one might have thought that at least she was asleep. Suddenly she arose. Without stopping to put on her dressing gown, she lighted a candle by the night lamp, pushed the bolt to her door and then went to the windows, the space between them forming rather a deep projection on account of the thickness of the walls. A portrait of the Duke of Bordeaux hung there; she raised it and pressing a button concealed in the wood work, a panel opened showing a small empty space. The shelf in this sort of closet contained only a rosewood casket. She opened this mysterious box and took from it a package of letters, then returned to her bed with the eagerness of a miser who is about gazing upon his treasures.



Had she not struggled and prayed? had she not offered upon the tyrannical altar of duty as an expiation, tears, pale cheeks and a tortured soul? had she not just taken a solemn vow in the presence of God and herself which ought to protect her against her weakness? was she not a virtuous wife, and had she not paid dearly enough for a moment of sad happiness? was it a crime to breathe for an instant the balmy air of love through the gratings of this prison cell, the doors of which she had just locked with her own hand? Admirable logic for loving hearts who, not being able to control their feelings, suffer in order to prove themselves less guilty and clothe themselves in hair cloth so that each shudder may cause a pain that condones the sin!

Being at peace with herself, she read as women read who are in love; leaning her head upon her hand she drew out the letters, one by one, from her bosom where she had placed them. She drank with her heart and eyes, the poison these passionate words contained; she allowed herself to be swayed at will by these melodies which lulled but did not benumb. When one of those invincible appeals of imploring passion awoke all the echoes of her love and ran through her veins like a thrill, striking the innermost depths of her heart, she threw herself back and imprinted her burning lips upon the cold paper. With one letter pressed to her heart, and one pressed to her lips she gave herself up completely, exclaiming in an inaudible voice: "I love thee! I am thine!"

The next morning, when Aline entered her sister-in-law's room according to her usual custom, the latter was not obliged to feign the indisposition she had planned; the sensations of this sleepless night had

paled her cheeks and altered her features; it would have been difficult to imagine a more complete contrast than that between these two young women at this moment. Clemence, lying upon her bed motionless and white as the sheet which covered her, resembled Juliet sleeping in her tomb; Aline, rosy, vivacious and more petulant than usual looked very much the mad-cap Mademoiselle de Corandeuil had reproached her to be. Her face was full of that still childish grace, more lovely than calm, more pleasing than impressive, which makes young girls so charming to the eye but less eloquent to the heart; for are they not fresh flowers more rich in coloring than in perfume?

Clemence could hardly stifle a sigh as she gazed at those rosy cheeks, those sparkling eyes, that life so full of the rich future. She recalled a time when she was thus, when grief glided over her cheeks without paling them, when tears dried as they left her eyes; she also had had her happy, careless days, her dreams of unalloyed happiness.

Aline, after presenting her face like a child who asks for a kiss, wished to tease her as usual, but with a tired gesture, her sister-in-law begged for mercy.

"Are you ill?" asked the young girl anxiously as she seated herself upon the edge of the bed.

Madame de Bergenheim smiled, a forced smile.

"Thank me for my poor health," said she, "for it obliges you to do the honors; I shall doubtless not be able to go down to dinner and you must take my place. You know that it tires my aunt to have to trouble herself about others."

Aline made up a little grimace as she replied:

"If I thought you were speaking seriously, I tell you I would go and get into my own bed at once!"

"Child! will you not in your turn be mistress of a home? Is it not necessary for you to become accustomed to it? It is an excellent opportunity, and, with my aunt as a guide, you are sure to acquit yourself well."

These last words were spoken rather maliciously, for the young woman knew that of all the possible mentors, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was the one whom Aline dreaded the most.

"I beg of you, my kind sister," replied the girl clasping her hands, "do not be ill to-day. Is it the neuralgia of the day before yesterday you are suffering from? Do be a right good sister and get up and come and take a walk in the park; the fresh air will cure you, I am sure of it—"

"And I shall not be obliged to preside at the dinner table, you would add, is it not so? You selfish girl!"

"I am afraid of Monsieur de Gerfaut," said the child lowering her voice.

When she heard pronounced this name, so deeply agitating her, Madame de Bergenheim was silent for a moment; at last she said:

"What has Monsiuer de Gerfaut done to you? Is it not downright ungrateful to be afraid of him so soon after the service he has rendered you?"

"No, I am not ungrateful," replied the young girl quickly. "I shall never forget that I owe my life to him, for certainly, but for him, I should have been dragged into the river. But he has such black, piercing eyes that they seem to look into your very soul; and then,

he is such an intelligent man! I am all the time afraid of saying something that he may laugh at. You know, some people think I talk too much; but I shall never dare open my mouth in his preesnce. Why do some persons' eyes make such an impression upon one?"

Clemence lowered her beautiful orbs and made no reply.

"His friend, Monsieur Marillac, does not frighten me one bit, in spite of his big mustache. Tell me, does not this Monsieur de Gerfaut frighten you a little too?"

"Not at all, I assure you," replied Madame de Bergenheim trying to smile; "but," continued she, in order to change the conversation, "how fine you look! You have certainly some plan of conquest. What! a city gown at nine o'clock in the morning and hair dressed as if for a ball."

"Would you like to know the compliment your aunt just paid me?"

"Some little jest of hers, I suppose?"

"You might say some spiteful remark, for she is the hatefulest thing! She told me that blue ribbons suited red hair very badly and advised me to change one or the other. Is it true that my hair is red?"

Mademoiselle de Bergenheim asked this question in such an anxious way that her sister-in-law could not repress a smile.

"You know that my aunt delights in annoying you," said she. "Your hair is very pretty, a bright blonde very pleasant to the eye; only Justine crimps it a little too tight; it curls naturally. She dresses your hair too high; it would be more becoming to you if she

pushed it back from your temples a little than to frizzle it as much as she does. Come a little nearer to me."

Aline knelt before Madame de Bergenheim's bed and the latter, adding a practical lesson to verbal advice, commenced modifying the maid's work to suit her own taste.

"It curls like a little mane," said the young girl as she saw the trouble her sister-in-law had in succeeding; "it was my great trouble at the 'Sacred Heart'. The sisters wanted us to wear our hair plain and I always had a terrible time to keep it in place. However blonde hair looks badly when too plainly dressed, and Monsieur de Gerfaut said yetersday that it was the shade he liked best."

"Monsieur de Gerfaut told you he liked blonde hair best!"

"Take care; you are pulling my hair! Yes, blonde hair and blue eyes. He said that when speaking of Carlo Dolci's Virgin, and he said she had the beautiful Jewish type; if he intended it as a compliment to me, I am very much obliged to him. Do you think that my eyes are as blue as that of the painted Virgin's? Monsieur de Gerfaut pretends that there is a strong resemblance."

Madame de Bergenheim withdrew her hand so quickly that she pulled out half a dozen or more hairs from her sister-in-law's head and buried herself up to the chin in the bed-clothes.

"Oh! Monsieur de Gerfaut knows how to pay very pretty compliments!" said she. "And you doubtless are very well pleased to resemble Carlo Dolci's Madonna?"

"She is very pretty!—and then it is the Holy Virgin, you know—Ah! I hear Monsieur de Gerfaut's voice in the garden."

The young girl arose quickly and ran to the window where, concealed behind the curtains, she could see what was going on outside without being seen herself.

"He is with Christian," continued she. "There, they are going to the library. They must have just taken a long walk for they are bespattered with mud. If you only could see what a pretty little cap Monsieur de Gerfaut has on!"

"Truly, he will turn her head," thought Madame de Bergenheim with a decided feeling of anger, then she closed her eyes as if she wished to sleep.

Gerfaut had, in fact, just returned from paying his respects to the estate. He had followed his host, who, under the pretext of showing him several picturesque sights, promenaded him, in the morning dew, through the lettuce in the kitchen garden and the underbrush in the park. But he knew through experience that all was not roses in a lover's path; watching in the snow, climbing walls, hiding in obscure closets, imprisonment in ward-robcs, were more disagreeable incidents than a quiet tete-a-tete with a husband.

He listened therefore complacently enough to Bergenheim's prolix explanations, interested himself in the planting of trees, thought the fields very green, the forests admirable, the granite rocks more beautiful than those of the Alps, went into ecstasies over the smallest vista, advised the establishment of a new mill on the river which, being navigable for rafts, might convey lumber to all the cities on the Moselle, and

thus greatly increase the value of the owner's woods. They fraternized like Glaucus and Diomedes; Gerfaut hoping, of course, to play the part of the Greek, who, according to Homer, received in return for a common iron armor a gold one of inestimable value. There is always such a secret mental reservation in the lover's mind when associating with the husband of his innamorata.

When he entered the room of his wife, whose indisposition had been reported to him, Christian's first words were:

"This Monsieur de Gerfaut appears to be a very excellent fellow, and I shall be delighted if he will stay with us a while. It is too bad that you are ill. He is a good musician as well as Marillac; you might have sung together. Try to get quickly better and come down to dinner."

"I cannot really tell him that Monsieur de Gerfaut has loved me for more than a year," said Madame de Bergenheim to herself.

A moment later, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil appeared and with a prim air, seated herself beside the bed.

"Perhaps you think that I am fooled by this indisposition. I see plainly that you wish to be impolite to Monsieur de Gerfaut, for you cannot endure him. It seems to me, however, that a relative of your family ought to be treated with more respect by you, above all, when you know how much I esteem him. This is unheard of absurdity and I shall end by speaking to your husband about it; we shall see if his intervention will not have more effect than mine."

"You shall not do that, aunt," interrupted Clemence

sitting up in bed and trying to take her aunt's hand.

"If you wish that your discourteous conduct should rest a secret between us, I advise you to get rid of your neuralgia this very day. Now, you had better decide right away—"

"This is genuine persecution," exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim falling back upon her bed when the old maid had departed. "He has bewitched everybody! Aline, my aunt and my husband; to say nothing of myself, for I shall end by going mad. I must end this at any price." She rang the bell violently.

"Justine," said she to her maid, "do not let any one enter this room under any pretext whatsoever, and do not come in yourself until I ring; I will try to sleep."

Justine obeyed, after closing the blinds. She had hardly gone out, than her mistress arose, put on her dressing gown and slippers with a vivacity which betokened anger; she then seated herself at her desk and commenced to write rapidly dashing her pen over the satiny paper without troubling herself as to blots. The last word was ended with a dash as energetically drawn as the Napoleonic flourish.

When a young man who, according to custom, begins to read the end of his letters first, finds an arabesque of this style at the bottom of a lady's letter, he ought to arm himself with patience and resignation before he reads its contents.

CHAPTER X

That evening, when Gerfaut entered his room he hardly took time to place the candlestick which he held in his hand upon the mantel before he took from his waist-coat pocket, a paper reduced to microscopic dimension, which he carried to his lips and kissed passionately before opening. His eyes fell first upon the threatening flourish of the final word; this word was: *adieu!*

"Hum!" said the lover, whose exaltation was sensibly cooled down at this sight.

He read the whole letter with one glance of the eye, darting to the culminating point of each phrase as a deer bounds over ledges of rocks; he weighed the plain meaning as well as the innuendoes of the slightest expression, like a rabbi who comments upon the Bible, and deciphered the erasures with the patience of a seeker after hieroglyphics, so as to detach from them some particle of the idea they had contained. After having analyzed and criticised this note in all its most impreceptible shades, he crushed it within his hand and commenced to pace the floor, uttering from time to time, some of those exclamations which the 'Dictionnaire de l' Academie' has not yet decided to sanction; for all lovers resemble the lazzaroni who kiss San-Gennaro's feet when he acts well, but who call him "briconne" as soon as they have reasons to complain of him. However, women are very kind, and

almost invariably excuse the stones that an angry lover throws at them in such moments of acute disappointment, and willingly say with the indulgent smile of the Roman emperor: 'I feel no wound!'

In the midst of this paroxysm of furious anger, two or three knocks resounded behind the woodwork.

"Are you composing?" asked a voice like that of a ventriloquist; "I am with you."

A minute later, Marillac appeared upon the threshold, in his slippers and with a silk handkerchief tied about his head, holding his candlestick in one hand and a pipe in the other; he stood there motionless.

"You are fine," said he, you are magnificent, fatal and accursed—You remind me of Kean in "Othello.—"

"Have you prayed to-night, Desdemona?"

Gerfaut gazed at him with frowning brows but made no reply.

"I will wager that it is the last scene in our third act," replied the artist placing his candlestick upon the mantel; "it seems that it is to be very tragic—Now listen, I also feel the poetical inflatus coming over me, and if you like, we will set about devouring paper like two boa constrictors. Speaking of serpents, have you a rattle? Ah! yes. Here is the bell-rope. I was going to say that we would have a bowl of coffee. Or rather I will go into the kitchen myself; I am very good friends with Marianne, the cook; besides the motto of the house of Bergenheim is *liberté, libertas*. Coffee is my muse; in this respect, I resemble Voltaire—"

"Marillac!" exclaimed his friend as he was about to leave the room. The artist turned about and meekly retraced his steps.

"You will be so good as to do me the favor of returning to your room," said Gerfaut. "You may work or you may sleep just as you like; between us, you would do well to sleep. I wish to be alone."

"You say that as if you meditated an attempt upon your illustrious person. Are you thinking of suicide? Let us see if you have some concealed weapon, some poisoned ring. Curse upon it! the poison of the Borgias! Is this white substance in this china bowl vulgarly called sugar, by some terrible chance infamous arsenic disguised under the appearance of an honest colonial commodity?"

"Be kind enough to spare your jokes," said Octave, as his friend poked about in all the corners of the room with an affectation of anxiety, "and as I cannot get rid of you, listen to my opinion; if you think that I brought you here for you to conduct yourself as you have done for the last two days you are mistaken."

"What have I done?"

"You left me the whole morning with that tiresome Bergenheim on my hands and I verily believe he made me count every stick in his park and every frog in his pond. To-night, when that old witch of Endor proposed her infernal game of whist, to which it seems I am to be condemned daily, you excused yourself upon the pretext of ignorance and yet you play as good a game as I do."

"I cannot endure whist at twenty sous a point."

"Do I like it any more?"

"Well! you are a nice fellow! you have an object in view which ought to make you swallow all these disagreeable trifles as if they were as sweet as honey. Is it possible you would like me to play Bertrand and

Raton? I should be Raton the oftener of the two!"

"But really, what did you do all day?"

Marillac posed before the mirror, arranged his kerchief about his head in a more picturesque fashion, twisted his mustache, puffed out, through the corner of his mouth, a cloud of smoke, which surrounded his face like a London fog, then turned to his friend and said with the air of a person perfectly satisfied with himself:

"Upon my faith, my dear friend, each one for himself and God for us all. You, for example, indulge in high toned love affairs; you must have titled ladies. Titles turn your head and make you exclusive. You make love to the aristocracy; so be it, that is your own concern. As for me, I have another system; I am in all matters of sentiment, what I am in politics: I want republican institutions."

"What is all that nonsense about?"

"Let me tell you. I want universal suffrage, the co-operation of all citizens, admission to all offices, general elections, a popular government, in a word, a sound, patriotic *hash*. Which means as regards women that I carry them *all* in my heart, that I recognize between them no distinction of caste or rank. Article first of my set of laws: all women are equal in love, provided they are young, pretty, admirably attractive in shape and carriage, above all, not too thin."

"And what of equality?"

"So much the worse. With this eminently liberal and constitutional policy, I am going to gather all the flowers that will allow themselves to be gathered by me, without the one being esteemed more fresh than

the other, because it belongs to the nobility, or the other less odorous, because plebeian. And as field daisies are a little more numerous than imperial roses, it follows that I very often stoop. That is why, at this very moment, I am up to my ears in a little rustic love affair:

‘Simple et naive bergerette, elle règne—’

“Stop your noise; Mademoiselle de Corandeuil’s room is just underneath.”

“I will tell you then, since I must give an account of myself, that I went into the park to sketch a few fir-trees before dinner; they are more beautiful of their kind than the ancient Fontainebleau oaks. That is for art. At dinner; I dined nobly and well. To do the Bergenheims justice they live in a royal manner. That is for the stomach. Afterwards I stealthily ordered a horse to be saddled and rode to La Fauconnerie in a trice, where I presented the expression of my adoration to Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot, a minor yet, but enjoying her full rights already. That is for the heart.”

“Indeed!”

“No sarcasm, if you please, everybody cannot share your taste for princesses who make you go a hundred leagues to follow them and then upon your arrival, only give you the tip of their glove to kiss. Such intrigues are not to my fancy.

‘Je suis sergent,
Brave—’

“Again, I tell you, will you please stop your noise? Don’t you know that I have nobody on my side at present but this respectable dowager on the first floor below? If she supposes that I am making all this

racket over her head we shall be deadly enemies by to-morrow."

"*Zitto zitto, piano piano,
Senza strepito e rumore,*"

replied Marillac putting his finger to his lips and lowering his voice. "What you say is a surprise to me. From the way in which you offered your arm to Madame de Bergenheim to lead her into the parlor after supper, I thought you understood each other perfectly. As I was returning, for I made it my duty to offer my arm to the old maid—and you say that I do nothing for you!—it seemed to me that I noticed a meeting of hands—You know that I have an eagle eye. She slipped a note into your hand as sure as my name is Marillac."

Gerfaut took the note which he held crumpled up in his hand and held it in the flame of one of the candles. The paper ignited and in less than a second nothing of it remained but a few dark pieces which fell into ashes upon the marble mantel.

"You burn it! You are wrong," said the artist; "as for me, I keep everything, letters and hair. When I am old, I shall have the letters to read evenings, and shall weave an allegorical picture with the hair. I shall hang it before my desk, so as to have before me a souvenir of the adorable creatures who furnished the threads. I will answer for it that there will be every shade in it from that of Camille Hautier, my first love who was an albino, to this here."

As he spoke, he took out of his pocket a small parcel from which he drew out a lock of coal black hair which he spread out upon his hand.

"Did you pull this hair from Titania's mane?" asked

Gerfaut as he drew through his fingers the more glossy than silky lock, which he ridiculed by this ironical supposition.

"They might be softer, I admit," replied Marillac negligently; and he examined the lock submitted to this merciless criticism as if it were simply a piece of goods, the fineness of whose texture he wished to assure himself of.

"You will admit at least that the color is beautiful and the quantity makes up for the quality. Upon my word, this poor Reine has given me enough to make a pacha's banner. Provincial and primitive simplicity! I know of one woman in particular who never gave an adorer more than seven of her hairs; and yet, at the end of three years, this cautious beauty was obliged to wear a false front. All her hair had disappeared.

"Are you like me, Octave? the first thing I ask for is one of these locks. Women rather like this sort of childishness and when they have granted you that, it is a snare spread for them which catches them."

Marillac took the long dark tress and held it near the candle; but his movement was so poorly calculated that the hair caught fire and was instantly destroyed.

"A bad sign," exclaimed Gerfaut who could not help but laugh at his friend's dismayed look.

"This is a day of auto-da-fes," said the artist dropping into a chair; "but bah! small loss; if Reine asks to see this lock, I will tell her that I destroyed it with kisses. That always flatters them, and I am sure it will please this little field flower. It is a fact that she has cheeks like rosy apples! On my way back I thought of a vaudeville that I would like to write up upon this. Only I would lay the scene in Switzerland

and I would call the young woman Betty or Kettly instead of Reine, a name ending in 'y' which would rhyme with Rutly, on account of local peculiarities. Will you join in it? I have almost finished the scenario. First scene—Upon the rising of the curtain, harvesters are discovered—"

"Will you do me the favor of going to bed?" interrupted Gerfaut.

"Chorus of harvesters:

Deja l'aurore
Qui se colore—"

"If you do not leave me alone, I will throw the contents of this water-pitcher at your head."

"I have never seen you in such a surly temper. It looks indeed as if your divinity had treated you cruelly."

"She has treated me shamefully!" exclaimed the lover whose anger was freshly kindled at this question; "she has treated me as one would treat a barber's boy. This note, which I just burned, was a most formal, unpleasant, insolent dismissal. This woman is a monster, do you understand me?"

"A monster! your angel, a monster!" said Marillac suppressing with difficulty a violent outburst of laughter.

"She, an angel! I must say that she is a demon—This woman—"

"Do you not adore her?"

"I hate her, I abhor her, she makes me shudder. You may laugh, if you like!"

As he said these words, Gerfaut struck a violent blow upon the table with his fist.

"You forget that Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's room

is just beneath us," said the artist in a joking tone.

"Listen to me, Marillac. Your system as regards women is vulgar, gross and trivial. The daisies which you gather, the maidens from whom you cut handfuls of hair excellent for stuffing mattresses, your rustic beauties with cheeks like rosy apples are conquests worthy of counter-jumpers in their Sunday clothes. It is nothing but the very lowest grade of love making, and yet you are right, a thousand times right, and wonderfully wise compared with me."

"You do me too much honor. So then you are not loved?"

"Truly, I had an idea I was, or if I was not loved to-day, I hoped to be to-morrow. But you are mistaken as to what discourages me. I simply fear that her heart is narrow. I believe that she loves me as much as she is able to love; unfortunately, that is not enough for me."

"It certainly seems to me that, so far, she has not shown herself madly in love with you."

"Ah, madly! Do you know many women who love madly with their hearts and souls? You talk like a college braggart. There are conquerors like yourself who, if we are to believe them, would devour a whole convent at their breakfast. These men excite my pity. As for me, really, I have always felt that it was most difficult to make oneself really loved. In these days of prudery, almost all women of rank appear *frappe a la glace* like a bottle of champagne. It is necessary to thaw them first, and there are some of them whose shells are so tenacious, that it would put out the devil's furnace. They call this virtue; I call it 'social servitude.' But what matters the name, the result is the same?"

"But really are you sure that Madame de Bergenheim loves you?" asked Marillac, emphasizing the word love so strongly as to attract his friend's attention.

"Sure? of course I am!" replied the latter. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because, when you are not quite so angry, I want to ask you something."—He hesitated a moment. "If you learned that she cared more for another than you, what would you do?"

Gerfaut looked at him and smiled disdainfully.

"Listen," said he, "you just heard me storm and curse, and you took this nonsense for genuine hatred. My good fellow! Do you know why I raved in such a manner? It was because knowing my temperament, I felt the necessity of getting angry and giving vent to what was in my heart. If I had not employed this infallible remedy, the annoyance which this note caused me would have disturbed my nerves all night, and when I do not sleep my complexion is more leaden than usual and I have dark rings under my eyes."

"Fop!"

"Simpleton!"

"Why simpleton?"

"Do you take me for a dandy? Do you not understand why I wish to sleep soundly? It is simply because I do not wish to appear before her with a face like a ghost. It's all that's needed to encourage her in her severity. I shall take good care that she does not discover how hard her last thrust has hit me. I would give you a one hundred franc note, if I could secure for to-morrow morning, your alderman's face and your complexion *a la Teniers*."

"Thanks, we are not masquerading just at present.

Nevertheless, all that you have said does not prove in the slightest that she loves you."

"My dear Marillac, words may have escaped me in my anger which may have caused you to judge hastily. Now that I am calm, and that my remedy has brought back my nervous system to its normal state, I am going to explain to you my real position. She is my Galatea, I her Pigmalion. 'An allegory as old as the world,' you are going to say to me; old or not, it is my true story. I have not yet broken the marble—virtue, education, propriety, duty, prejudices—which covers the flesh of my statue; but I am nearing my goal and I shall reach it. Her desperate resistance is the very proof of my progress. It is a terrible step for a woman to take, from no to yes. My Galatea begins to feel the blows from my heart over her heart and she is afraid—afraid of the world, of me, of her husband, of herself, of heaven and hell. Do you not adore women who are afraid of everything? She, love another! never. It is written in all eternity that she shall be mine. What did you wish to say to me?"

"Nothing, since you are so sure of her."

"Sure, more than of my eternal life. But I want to know what you mean."

"But you won't be told. Just a suspicion that came to me; something that was told me the other day; a conjecture so vague that it would be useless to dwell upon it."

"I am not good at guessing enigmas," said Octave in a dry tone.

"We will speak of this again to-morrow."

"As you like, replied the lover with somewhat affected indifference. "If you wish to play the part of

Iago with me, I warn you I am not disposed to jealousy."

"To-morrow, I tell you, I will enlighten myself as to this affair; whatever the result of my inquiries may be, I will tell you the truth. After all, it was nothing but woman's gossip.

"Very well, take your time. But I have another favor to ask of you. To-morrow, I shall try to persuade the ladies to take a walk in the park. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil will probably not go; you must do me the favor of sticking to Bergenheim and the little sister and to gradually walk on ahead of us, in such a way as to give me an opportunity of speaking with this cruel creature alone for a few moments; for she has given me to understand that I shall not succeed in speaking with her alone under any circumstances and it is absolutely necessary that I should do so."

"There will be one difficulty in the way though, they expect about twenty persons to dinner and all her time will probably be taken up with her duties as hostess.

"That is true," exclaimed Gerfaut, jumping up so suddenly that he upset his chair.

"You still forget that Mademoiselle de Corandeuil rooms beneath us."

"The devil is playing her hand!" exclaimed the lover as he paced the room in long strides. "I wish that during the night, he would wring the neck of all these visitors. Now then, she has her innings. To-day and to-morrow this little despot's battle of Ligny will be fought and won; but the day after to-morrow, look out for her Waterloo!"

"Good night, my lord Wellington," said Marillac, as he arose and took up his candlestick.

"Good night, Iago! Ah! you think you have annoyed me with your mysterious words and melodramatic reticence?"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" replied the artist as he left the room.

"Ce secret-là
Se trahira."

CHAPTER XI

The next morning, before most of the inhabitants of the chateau had thought of leaving their beds, or at least their rooms, a man, on horseback and alone, took his departure through a door opening from the stable yard into the park. He wore a long traveling redingote trimmed with braid and fur, rather premature clothing for the season, but which the sharp cold air that was blowing at this moment made appear very comfortable. He galloped away and continued this pace, for about three quarters of a mile, in spite of the unevenness of the road which followed a nearly straight line over hilly ground. It would have been difficult to decide which to admire the most, the horse's limbs or the rider's lungs; for the latter, during this rapid ride, had sung without taking breath, so to speak, the whole overture to "Wilhelm Tell." We must admit that the voice in which he sang the andante of the Swiss mountaineer's chorus resembled a reed pipe more than a hautboy; but to make amends when he reached the presto, his voice, a rather good bass, struck the horse's ears with such force that the latter redoubled his vigor as if this melody had produced upon him the effect of a trumpet, sounding the charge on the day of battle.

The traveler, whom we have probably recognized by his musical feat, ended his concert by stopping at the entrance to some woods which extended from the

top of the rocks to the river, breaking, here and there, the uniformity of the fields. After gazing about him for sometime, he left the road and entering the woods on the right stopped at the foot of a large tree. Near this tree was a very small brook which took its source not far away and descended with a sweet murmur to the river, making a narrow bed in the clayey ground which it watered. Such was the modesty of its course that a little brighter green and fresher grass a few feet away from it were the only indications which announced its presence. Nothing was wanting to make this an idyllic place for a rendezvous, neither the protecting shade, the warbling of birds in the trees, the picturesque landscape surrounding it, nor the soft grass for carpet and cushions.

After dismounting from his steed and tying him to the branches of an oak, thus conforming to the time honored custom of lovers, the cavalier struck his foot upon the ground three or four times to start the circulation in his legs and then drew from his pocket a very pretty Breguet watch.

"Ten minutes past eight," said he; "I am late and yet I am early. It looks as if the clocks at La Fauconnerie were not very well regulated." He walked up and down with a quick step whistling with a vengeance:

"Quand je quitterai la Normandie—

J' attends—J' attends—"

a refrain which the occasion brought to his mind. When this pastime was exhausted he had recourse to another, the nature of which proved that if the expected beauty had not exactitude for a virtue, she was not one of those little exacting creatures always ready

to faint or whose delicate nerves make them extremely intolerant of their lovers' imperfections. Plunging his hand into one of the pockets in his redingote, he drew out a seal-skin case filled with Havana cigars and lighting one, commenced to smoke, while continuing his promenade.

But at the end of a few moments, this palliative, like the first, had exhausted its effect.

"Twenty-five minutes past eight!" exclaimed Marillac, as he looked at his watch a second time; "I should like to know what this little miniature rose takes me for? It was hardly worth the trouble of overstraining this poor horse who looks as wet as if he had come out of the river. It is enough to give him inflammation of the lungs. If Bergenheim were to see him sweating and panting like this in this bleak wind, he would give me a sound blowing up. Upon my word, it is becoming comical! There are no more young girls! I shall see her appear presently as spruce and conceited as if she had been playing the finest trick in the world. It will do for once; but if we are going to sojourn in these quarters sometime yet, she must be educated and taught to say: 'If you please' and 'thanks.' Ah! ha! she has no idea what sort of a man she is dealing with! Half past eight! If she is not here in five minutes I will go to La Fauconnerie and raise a terrible uproar. I will break every bit of crockery there is in the "Femme-sans-Tete" with blows from my whip. What can I do to kill time?" He raised his head quickly as he felt himself suddenly almost drenched under a shower of dust. This was a fatal movement for him, for his eyes received part of the libation destined for his hair. He closed them with

a disagreeable sensation, after having seen Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot's fresh chubby face, prim beyond measure in a lilac and green plaid gingham dress, and carrying a basket on her arm, a necessary burden to maidens of a certain class who play truant.

"What sort of breeding is this?" exclaimed Marillac rubbing his eyes; "you have made me dance attendance for an hour and now you have blinded me; I do not like this a bit, I want you to understand."

"How you talk to me, just for a little pinch of dust!" replied Reine turning as red as a cherry as she threw the remainder of the handful which she had taken from a mole heap close by them.

"It is because it smarts like the devil," replied the artist in a milder tone, for he realized the ridiculousness of his anger; "since you have hurt me, try at least to ease the pain; they say that to blow in the eye will cure it."

"No, I'll do nothing of the kind—I don't like to be spoken to harshly."

The artist arose at once as he saw the young girl make a movement as if to go; he put his arm about her waist and half forced her to sit beside him.

"The grass is damp and I shall stain my dress," said she as a last resistance.

A handkerchief was at once spread upon the ground, in lieu of a carpet, by the lover who had suddenly become very polite again.

"Now, my dear Reine," continued he, "will you tell me why you come so late? Do you know that for an hour I have been tearing my hair in despair."

"Fortunately the dust will make it grow again," replied she with a malicious glance at Marillac, whose

head was powdered with brown as if a tobacco box had been emptied upon it.

"Naughty girl!" exclaimed he laughing, although his eyes looked as if he were crying; and acting upon the principle of retaliation less odious in love than in war, he tried to snatch a kiss to punish her.

"Stop that, Monsieur Marillac! you know very well what you promised me."

"To love you forever, you entrancing creature," said he in the voice of a crocodile who sighs to attract his prey.

Reine pursed up her lips and assumed important airs, but in order to obey the feminine instinct which prescribes changing the subject of conversation after too direct an avowal, with the firm intention of returning to it later through another channel, she said:

"What were you doing just as I arrived? You were so busy you did not hear me coming. You were so droll; you waved your arms in the air and struck your forehead as you talked."

"I was thinking of you."

"But it was not necessary in order to do that to strike your head with your fist. It must have hurt you."

"Adorable woman!" exclaimed the artist in a passionate tone.

"Mon Dieu! how you frighten me. If I had known, I would not have come here at all. I must go away directly."

"Leave me already, queen of my heart! No! do not expect to, I would sooner lose my life—"

"Will you stop! what if some one should hear you; they might be passing," said Reine gazing anxiously

about her. "If you knew how frightened I was in coming! I told mamma that I was going to the mill to see my uncle; but that horrid old Lambernier met me just as I entered the woods. What shall I do if he tells that he saw me? This is not the road to the mill. It is to be hoped that he has not followed me! I should be in a pretty plight!"

"You can say that you came to gather berries or nuts, or to hear the nightingale sing; Mother Gobillot will not think anything of it. Who is this Lambernier?"

"You know—the carpenter—You saw him at our house the other day."

"Ah! ah!" said Marillac with interest, "the one who was turned away from the chateau the other day?"

"Yes, and they did well to do it, too; he is a downright bad man."

"He is the one who told you something about Madame de Bergenheim. Tell me the story. Your mother interrupted us yesterday just as you commenced telling it to me—What was it that he said?"

"Oh! falsehoods probably. One cannot believe anything that he says."

"But what did he tell you?"

"What difference does it make to you what is said about the baroness?" replied the young girl rather spitefully, as she saw that Marillac was not exclusively occupied in thinking of her.

"Pure curiosity. He told you then that he would tell the baron what he knew and that the latter would give him plenty of money to make him keep silent?"

"It makes no difference what he told me. Ask him if you wish to know. Why did you not stay at the

chateau if you can only think of the baroness? Are you in love with her?"

"I am in love with you, my dear." (The devil take me if she is not jealous now! How shall I make her talk?) "I am of the same opinion as you are," replied he in a loud voice, "that all this talk of Lambernier's is pure calumny."

"There is no doubt about it. He is well known about the place; he has a wicked tongue and watches everything that one does or says in order to report it at cross purposes. Mon Dieu! suppose he should make some story out of his seeing me enter these woods!"

"Madame de Bergenheim," continued the artist with affectation, "is certainly far above the gossip of a scoundrel of this kind."

Reine pursed up her lips but made no reply.

"She has too many good qualities and virtues for people to believe anything he says."

"Oh, as to that, there are hypocrites among the Parisian ladies as well as elsewhere," said the young girl with a sour look.

"Bless me!" thought Marillac, "we have it now. I'd wager my last franc that I'll loosen her tongue."

"Madame de Bergenheim," replied he emphasizing each word, "is such a good woman, so sensible and so pretty!"

"Mon Dieu! say that you love her at once, then—that'll be plain talk," exclaimed Reine suddenly disengaging herself from the arm which was still about her waist. "A great lady who has her carriages and footmen in livery, is a conquest to boast of! While a country girl who has only her virtue—"

She lowered her eyes with an air of affected modesty and did not finish her sentence.

"A virtue which grants a rendezvous at the end of three days' acquaintance and in the depths of the woods! That is prime!" thought the artist.

"Still, you will not be the first of the fine lady's lovers," continued she, raising her head and trying to conceal her vexation under an ironical air.

"These are falsehoods."

"Falsehoods, when I tell you that I know what I am speaking about! Lambernier is not a liar."

"Lambernier is not a liar?" repeated a harsh hoarse voice which seemed to come from the cavity of the tree under which they were seated. "Who has said that Lambernier was a liar?"

At the same moment, the carpenter in person suddenly appeared upon the scene. He stood before the stupefied couple with his brown coat thrown over his shoulders, as usual, and his broad brimmed gray hat pulled down over his ears, gazing at them with his deep, ugly eyes and a sardonic laugh escaping from his lips.

Mademoiselle Reine uttered a shriek as if she had seen Satan rise up from the ground at her feet; Marillac rose with a bound and seized his whip.

"You are a very insolent fellow," said he in his ringing bass voice. "Go your way."

"I receive no such orders," replied the workman in a tone which justified the epithet which had just been bestowed upon him; "we are upon public ground and I have a right to be here as well as you."

"If you do not take to your heels at once," said the artist becoming purple with rage, "I will cut your face in two."

"Apples are sometimes cut in two," said Lambernier sneeringly advancing his face with an air of bravado.

"My face is not afraid of your whip; you cannot frighten me because you are a gentleman and I a workman! I snap my fingers at bourgeois like—"

This time he did not have time to finish his comparison; a blow from the whip cut him in the face and made him reel in spite of himself.

"By thunder!" exclaimed he in a voice like thunder, "may I lose my name if I do not polish you off well!"

He threw his coat on the grass, spat in his hands and rubbed them together assuming the position of an athlete ready for a boxing bout.

Mademoiselle Gobillot arose trembling with fright at this demonstration and uttered two or three inarticulate cries; but instead of throwing herself between the combatants in the approved style, she ran away as fast as she could.

Although the weapons of the adversaries were not of a nature to spill blood upon the turf, there was something warlike about their countenances which would have done honor to ancient paladins. Lambernier squatting upon his legs according to the rules of pugilism and with his fists on a level with his shoulders resembled, somewhat, a cat ready to bound upon its prey. The artist stood with his body thrown backwards, his legs on a tension, his chin buried up to his mustache in the fur collar of his coat, with whip lowered watching all of his adversaries movements with a steady eye. When he saw the carpenter advancing toward him, he raised his arm and gave him on the left side a second lash from his whip so vigorously applied that the workman beat a retreat once more rubbing his hands and roaring:

"Thunder! I'll finish you—"

He put his hands in his trousers' pocket and drew out one of those large iron compasses such as carpenters use, and opened it with a rapid movement. He then seized it in the center and was thus armed with a sort of double pointed stiletto which he brandished with a threatening gesture.

Marillac, at this sight, drew back a few paces, passed his whip to his left hand and arming himself with his Corsican poignard placed himself in a position of defense.

"My friend," said he with perfect deliberation, "my needle is shorter than yours, but it pricks better. If you take one step nearer me, if you raise your hand, I will bleed you like a wild boar."

Seeing the firm attitude of the artist, whose solid figure seemed to denote rather uncommon vigor, and whose mustache and sparkling eyes gave him rather a formidable aspect at this moment, above all when he saw the large, sharp blade of his poignard, Lambercier stopped.

"By the gods!" exclaimed Marillac who saw that his bold looks had produced their effect, "you are a Provençal, and I a Gascon. You have a quick hand, comrade—"

"But by jove! you are the one who has the quick hand; you struck me with your whip as if I had been a horse—You have put my eye almost out. Do you imagine that I am well provided for like yourself and have nothing to do but to flirt with girls? I need my eyes in order to work, by G—! Because you are a bourgeois and I a workman—"

"I am no more of a bourgeois than you," replied the artist, rather glad to see his adversary's fury ex-

haust itself in words and his attitude assume a less threatening character; "pick up your compass and return to your work. Here," added he taking two five franc pieces from his pocket. "You were a little boorish and I a little hasty. Go and bathe your eyes with a glass of wine.

Lambernier scowled and his eyes darted ugly, hateful glances. He hesitated a moment as if he were thinking to himself what he had better do and was weighing his chances of success in case of a hostile resolve. After a few moments' reflection, prudence got the better of his anger. He closed his compass and put it in his pocket but he refused the silver offered him.

"You are generous," said he with a bitter smile; "five francs for each blow of the whip! I know a good many people who would offer you their cheek twelve hours of the day at that price. But I am not one of that kind; I ask nothing of nobody."

"If Leonardo da Vinci could have seen this fellow's face just now," thought the artist, "he would not have had to seek so long for his model for the face of his Judas. Only for my poinard, my fate would have been settled. This man was ready to murder me."

"Listen, Lambernier," said he, "I was wrong to strike you and I would like to atone for it. I have been told that you were sent away from the chateau against your will. I am intimate enough with M. de Bergenheim to be useful to you; do you wish me to speak to him for you?"

The carpenter stood motionless in his place with his eyes fixed upon his adversary while the latter was preparing his horse to mount, eyes which seemed

filled with hatred to their very depths. His face suddenly changed its expression and became abjectly polite when he heard himself addressed anew. He shook his head two or three times before replying.

"Unless you are the very devil," he said, "I defy you to make this gentleman say yes when he has once said no. He turned me away like a dog; all right. Let them laugh that win. It was that old idiot of a Rousselet and that old simpleton of a coachman of Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's who told tales about me. I could tell tales also if I liked."

"But what motive could they have to send you away?" continued Marillac, "you are a clever workman. I have seen your work at the chateau; there are some rooms yet unfinished; there must have been some very grave reason for their not employing you just at the moment when they needed you most."

"They said that I talked with Mademoiselle Justine and Madame caused me to be discharged. She is the mistress there, is she not? But I am the one to make her repent for it."

"And how can you make her repent for it?" asked the artist, whose curiosity, left ungratified by Mademoiselle Reine, was growing more and more excited, "what can you have in common with madame la baronne?"

"Because she is a lady and I am a workman, you mean? All the same, if I could only whisper two or three words in her ear, she would give me more gold than I have earned since I worked at the chateau, I am sure of it."

"By the powers! if I were in your place, I would say those words to her this very day."

"So as to be thrown out by this band of idle fellows in their red coats. None of that for me. I have my own scheme; let them laugh that win!"

As he repeated this proverb, the workman uttered his usual sardonic laugh.

"Lambertier," said the artist in a serious tone, "I have heard of certain very strange speeches that you have made within the last few days. Do you know that there is a punishment by law for those who invent calumnies?"

"Is it a calumny, when one can prove what he says?" replied the carpenter with assurance.

"What is it that you undertake to prove?" exclaimed Marillac suddenly.

"Eh! you know very well that if M. le baron—"he did not continue, but with a coarse gesture he finished explaining his thoughts.

"You can prove this?"

"Before the courts, if necessary."

"Before the courts would not amount to very much for you; but if you will cease this talk and never open your mouth of all this, whatever it may be, and will give to me and me only this proof of which you speak, I will give you ten napoleons."

For a moment Lambertier gazed at the artist with a singularly penetrating glance.

"So you have two sweethearts then—one from the city and one from the country, a married woman and this poor girl," said he in a jeering tone; "does little Reine know that she is playing second fiddle?"

"What do you mean to insinuate?"

"Oh! you are more clever than I am."

The two men looked at each other in silence trying to read each other's thoughts.

"This is a lover of Madame de Bergenheim's" thought Lambernier with the barefaced impudence of his kind; "if I were to tell him what I know, my vengeance would be in good hands, without my taking the trouble to commit myself."

"Here is a sneaking fellow who pretends to be deucedly strong in diplomacy," said Marillac to himself; "but he is revengeful and I must make him explain himself."

"Ten napoleons are not to be found every day," continued the carpenter after a moment's silence; "you may give them to me, if you like, in a week."

"You will be able to prove to me, then, what you have said," replied Marillac with hesitation, blushing in spite of himself at the part he was playing in that moment and upon the odious side of which he had not looked until now. "Bah!" said he to himself in order to quiet his conscience, "if this rascal really knows anything it is much better that I should buy the secret than anybody else. I should never take advantage of it and I might be able to render the lady a service. Is it not a gentleman's sworn duty to devote himself to the defence of an imprudent beauty who is in danger?"

"I will bring you the proof you want," said the carpenter.

"When?"

"Meet me Monday at four o'clock in the afternoon at the cross-roads near the corner of the Corne woods."

"At the end of the park?"

"Yes, a little above the rocks."

"I will be there. Until then, you will not say a word to anybody?"

"That is a bargain, since you buy the goods I have for sale—"

"Here is some money to bind the trade," replied the artist. And he handed him the silver pieces he still held in his hand; Lambernier took them this time without any objections and put them in his pocket.

"Monday, at four o'clock!"

"Monday at four o'clock!" repeated Marillac as he mounted his horse and started off in great haste as if anxious to take leave of his companion. He turned when he reached the road and looking behind him saw the workman standing motionless at the foot of the tree.

"There is a scamp," thought he, "whose ball and chain are waiting for him at Toulon or Best, and I have just concluded a devilish treaty with him. Bah! I have nothing to reproach myself with. Of two evils choose the least; it remains to be seen whether Gerfaut is the dupe of a coquette or whether his love is threatened with some catastrophe; at all events I am his friend and I ought to clear up this mystery and put him on his guard."

"Ten francs to-day, and ten napoleons Monday," said Lambernier as, with an eye in which there was a mixture of scorn and hatred, he watched the traveler disappear, "I should be a double idiot to refuse. But this does not pay for the blows from your whip, you puppy; when we have settled this affair of the fine lady, I shall attend to you."

CHAPTER XII.

The visitors referred to in the conversation between the two friends arrived at the castle at an early hour, according to the custom in the country, where they dine in the middle of the day. Gerfaut saw from his chamber, where he had remained like Achilles under his tent, a half dozen carriages drive one after the other up the avenue bringing the guests announced by Marillac. Little by little the company scattered through the gardens in groups; four or five young girls under Aline's escort hurried to a swing to which several good natured young men attached themselves and among them Gerfaut recognized his Pylades. During this time, Madame de Bergenheim was doing the honors of the house to the matrons, who thought this amusement too youthful for their age and preferred a quiet walk through the park. Christian, on his side, was explaining methods of improvements to gentlemen of agricultural and industrial appearances who seemed to listen to him with great interest. Three or four others had taken possession of the billiard table, while the more venerable among the guests had remained in the parlor with Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"Have you a pair of clean trousers?" asked Marillac hastily entering his friend's room as the first bell rang for dinner. An enormous green stain upon one of his

knees was all the explanation necessary on this subject.

"You lose no time," said Grefaut as he opened a drawer in his closet. "Which of these rustic beauties has had the honor of seeing you on your knees at her feet?"

"It was that d—d swing! Silly invention! To sacrifice oneself to please little girls! If I am ever caught at it again, I'll let you know! Your selfish method is the better one. By the way, Madame de Bergenheim asked me, with rather a sly look, if you were ill and if you would not come down to dinner?"

"Irony!"

"It seemed like it. The lady smiled in a decidedly disagreeable manner. I am not timid but I would rather write a vaudeville in three acts than to be obliged to make a declaration to her if she had this impish smile on her lips. She has a way of protruding her under lip—Ugh! do you know you are terribly slender? Will you let me cut the band of your trousers? I never could dance with my stomach compressed in this manner."

"What about this secret you were to reveal to me?" interrupted Gerfaut with a smile which seemed to denote perfect security.

Marillac looked at his friend with a grave countenance, then commenced to laugh in an embarrassed manner.

"We will leave serious matters until to-morrow," replied he. "The essential thing to-day is to make ourselves agreeable. Madame de Bergenheim asked me a little while ago if we would be kind enough to sing a few duets. I accepted for us both. I do not suppose

that the inhabitants of this valley have often heard the duet from "Mose" with the embellishments a la Tamburini.

"Palpito a quello aspetto,

"Gemo nel suo dolor.

"Would you prefer that or the one from the Barbieri? the Barbieri is out of date, now."

"Whatever pleases you, but do not split my head about it in advance. I wish that music and dancing were at the bottom of the Moselle."

"With all my heart, but not the dinner. I gave a glance into the dining-room; it promises to be very fine. Now then, everybody has returned to the house; to the table!"

The time has long since passed when Paris and the province formed two regions almost foreign to each other. To-day, thanks to the rapidity of communications, and the importations of all kinds which reach the center from the circumference without having time to spoil on the way, Paris and the rest of France are only one immense body excited by the same opinions, dressed in the same fashions, laughing at the same bon mots, revolutionized by the same opinions.

Provincial customs have almost entirely lost their peculiarities; a drawing-room filled with guests is the same everywhere. There are sometimes exceptions, however. The company gathered together at the Bergenheim chateau was an example of one of those heterogeneous mixtures which the most exclusive mistress of a mansion cannot avoid, if she wishes to be neighborly, and in which a duchess may have on her right at the table the village mayor, and the most elegant of ladies, a corpulent justice of the peace who

believes he is making himself agreeable as he urges his fair neighbor to frequent potations.

Madame de Bergenheim had discovered symptoms of haughty jealousy among her country neighbors, always ready to feel themselves insulted and very little qualified to make themselves agreeable in society. So she resolved to extend a general invitation to all those whom she felt obliged to receive, in order to relieve herself at once of a nuisance for which no pleasure could prove an equivalent. This day was one of her duty days.

In the midst of these ladies, much more gorgeously than elegantly attired, of these healthy young girls with large arms and feet shaped like flat irons, of preponderous gentlemen strangled by their white ties and puffed up in their dress suits, Gerfaut, whose nervous system had been singularly irritated by his disappointment of the night before, felt ready to burst with rage. He was seated at the table between two ladies, who seemed to have exhausted, in their toilets, every color in the solar spectrum, and whose coquettish instincts were aroused by the proximity of a celebrated writer. But their simperings were all lost; the one for whom they were intended bore himself in a sulky way, which fortunately passed for romantic melancholy; this rendered him still more interesting in the eyes of his neighbor on the left, a plump blonde about twenty-five years old, fresh and dimpled, and doting upon Lord Byron, a common pretention among pretty buxom women, who dote on false sentimentality.

With the exception of a bow when he entered the drawing room, Octave had not shown Madame de Bergenheim any attention. The cold, disdainful, bored

manner in which he patiently endure the pleasures of the day, exceeded even the privilege for boorish bearing willingly granted to gentlemen of unquestionable talent. Clemence, on the contrary seemed to increase in amiability and liveliness. There was not one of her tiresome guests to whom she did not address some pleasant remark, not one of those vulgar, pretentious women to whom she was not gracious and attentive; one would have said that she had a particular desire to be more attractive than usual, and that her lover's somber air added materially to her good humor.

After dinner they retired to the drawing room where coffee was served. A sudden shower, whose drops pattered loudly against the windows, rendered all plans for amusement out doors impossible. Gerfaut soon noticed a rather animated conversation taking place between Madame de Bergenheim, who was somewhat embarrassed as to how to amuse her guests for the remainder of the afternoon, and Marillac who, with his accustomed enthusiasm, had constituted himself master of ceremonies. A moment later, the drawing door opened and servants appeared bending under the burden of an enormous grand piano which was placed between the windows. At this sight, a tremor of delight ran through the group of young girls while Octave, who was standing in one corner near the mantel, finished his Mocha with a still more melancholy air.

"Now then!" said Marillac, who had been extremely busy during these preparations, and had spread a dozen musical scores upon the top of the piano, "it is agreed that we shall sing the duet from 'Mose'.

There are two or three little boarding school misses here whose mothers are dying for them to show off. You understand that we must sacrifice ourselves to encourage them. Besides, a duet for male voices is the thing to open a concert with."

"A concert! has Madame de Bergenheim arranged to pasture us in this sheepfold in order to make use of us this evening?" replied Gerfaut whose ill humor increased every moment.

"Five or six pieces only, afterwards they will have a dance. I have an engagement with your diva; if you wish for a quadrille and have not yet secured your number I should advise you to ask her for it now, for there are five or six dandies who seem to be terribly attentive to her. After our duet, I shall sing the trio from 'La Dame Blanche,' with those young ladies who have eyes as round as a fish's, and apricot colored gowns on—those two over there in the corner, near that pretty blonde who sat beside you at table and ogled you all the time. She had already bored me to death! I do not know whether I shall be able to hit my low 'G' right or not. I have a cataplasm of charlotte-russe in my stomach. Just listen:

"A cette complaisance!—"

Marillac leaned toward his friend and roared the notes supposed to be the "G" in question in his ear.

"Like an ophicleide," said Gerfaut, who could not help laughing at the importance the artist attached to his display of talent.

"In that case, I shall risk my great run at the end of the first solo. Two octaves from 'E' to 'E'! Zuchelli was good enough to give me a few points as to the time, and I do it rather nicely."

"Madame would like to speak to monsieur," said a servant who interrupted him in the midst of his sentence.

Dolce, soave amor, warbled the artist softly as he responded to the call from the lady of the house, trying to fix in his mind this run which he regarded as one of the most beautiful flowers in his musical crown.

Everybody was seated, Madame de Bergenheim sat at the piano and Marillac stood behind her. The artist selected one of the scores, spread it out on the rack, turned down the corners so that during the execution he might not be stopped by some refractory leaf, coughed in his deep bass voice, placed himself in such a manner as to show the side of his head which he thought would produce the best effect upon the audience, then gave a knowing nod to Gerfaut who still stood gloomy and isolated in a far off corner.

"We trespass upon your kindness too much, monsieur," said Madame de Bergenheim to him when he had responded to this mute invitation; and as she struck a few chords, she raised her dark brown eyes to his. It was the first glance she had given him that day; from coquetry, perhaps, or because sorrow for her lover had softened her heart; or because she felt remorse for the extreme harshness of her note the night before, we must admit that this glance had nothing very discouraging in it. Octave bowed and spoke a few words as coldly polite as he would have spoken to a woman sixty years of age.

Madame de Bergenheim lowered her eyes and endeavored to smile disdainfully as she struck the first bars of the duet.

The concert commenced. Gerfaut had a sweet, clear,

tenor voice which he used skilfully, gliding over dangerous passages, skipping too difficult ones which he thought beyond his execution, singing, in fact, with the prudence of an amateur who cannot spend his time studying runs and chromatic passages four hours daily. He sang his solo with a simplicity bordering upon negligence and even substituted for the rather complicated passage at the end a more than modest ending.

Clemence, for whom he had often sung, putting his whole soul into the performance, was vexed with this affectation of indifference. It seemed to her as if he ought, for her sake, to make more of an effort in her drawing room, whatever may be their private quarrel; she felt it was a consideration due to her and to which his numerous homages had accustomed her. She entered this new grievance in a double entry book which a woman always devotes to the slightest actions of the man who pays court to her.

Marillac, on the contrary, was grateful to his friend for this indifference of execution, for he saw in it an occasion to shine at his expense. He commenced his solo *e li ciel per moi sereno*, with an unusual tension of the larynx, roaring out his low notes. Except for the extension being a little irregular and unconnected, he did not acquit himself very badly in the first part. When he reached his final run, he took a long breath, as if it devolved upon him to set in motion all the windmills in Montmartre and started off with a majestic fury; the first forty notes, while they did not resemble Mademoiselle Grisi's pearly tones, ascended and descended without any notable accident; but at the last stages of the descent, the singer's

breath and voice failed him at the same moment, the "A" came out weak, the "G" was stifled, the "F" resembled the buzzing of a bee and the "E" was absent—!

Zuchelli's run was like one of those gothic staircases which show an almost complete state of preservation upon the upper floor, but whose base, worn off by time, leaves a solution of continuity between the ground and the last step.

Madame de Bergenheim waited the conclusion of this dangerous run, not thinking to strike the final chord; the only sound which was heard was the rustling of the dilettante's beard, whose chin sought his voice in vain in the depths of his satin cravat, accompanied by applause from a benevolent old lady who had judged of the merit of the execution by the desperate contortions of the singer.

"D—n that charlotte-russe!" growled the artist whose face was as red as a lobster.

The rest of the duet was sung without any new incident and gave general satisfaction.

"Madame, your piano is a half tone too low," said the basso with a reproachful accent.

"That is true," replied Clemeuce who could not restrain a smile; "I have so little voice that I am obliged to have my piano tuned to suit it. You can well afford to pardon me for my selfishness, for you sang like an angel."

Marillac bowed, partly consoled by this compliment, but thinking to himself that a hostess' first duty was to have her piano in tune and not to expose a bass singer to the danger of imperiling his low "E" before an audience of forty.

"Madame, can I be of any more service to you?"

asked Gerfaut as he leaned toward Madame de Bergenheim with one of his coldest smiles.

"I do not want to impose further upon your kindness, monsieur," said she in a voice which showed her secret displeasure.

The poet bowed and walked away.

Then Clemence, upon general request, sang a romance with more taste than brilliancy, and more method than expression. It seemed as if Octave's icy manner had reacted upon her in spite of the efforts she had made at first to maintain a cheerful air. A singular oppression overcame her, once or twice she feared her voice would fail her entirely. When she finished, the compliments and applause with which she was overwhelmed seemed so insupportable to her that it was with difficulty that she could restrain herself from leaving the room. While exasperated by her weakness, she could not help but cast a glance in Octave's direction. She could not catch his eye, however, as he was busily talking with Aline. She felt so lonely and deserted at this moment, and longed so for this glance which she could not obtain that tears of vexation filled her eyes.

"I was wrong to write him as I did," thought she; "but if he really loved me, he would not so quickly resign himself to obeying me!"

A woman in a drawing room resembles a soldier on a breast-work; self abnegation is the first of her duties; however much she may suffer, she must present as calm and serene a countenance as a warrior in the hour of danger, and fall, if necessary, upon the spot, with death in her heart and a smile upon her lips. In order to obey this unwritten law, Madame de Ber-

genheim, after a slight interruption, seated herself at the piano to accompany three or four young girls who were each to sing in turn the songs that they had been drilled on for six months. Marillac, who had prudently gone into the dining room to strengthen his stomach with a glass of rum, atoned for his little mishap, in the trio from 'La Dame Blanche,' and everything went for the best. Finally, to close this concert (may heaven preserve us from all exhibition of this kind!) Aline was led to the piano by her brother who, like all people who are not musical, could not understand why one should study music for years if not from love for the art. Christian was fond of his little sister and very proud of her talents. The poor child, whose courage had all disappeared, sang in a fresh, trembling little voice, a romance revised and corrected at her boarding school. The word love had been replaced by that of friendship, and to repair this slight fault of prosody, the extra syllable disappeared in a hiatus which would have made Boileau's blonde wig stand on end. But the 'Sacred Heart' has a system of versification of its own which, rather than to allow the dangerous expression to be used, lest ultra-modesty destroy poetry.

This sample of sacred music was the final number of the concert; after that, they began dancing, and Gerfaut invited Aline. Whether because he wished to struggle against his ill humor, or from kindness of heart because he understood her emotion, he commenced to talk with the young girl who was still blushing from her success. Among his talents, Octave possessed in a peculiar degree that of adapting his conversation to the age, position and character of his

companions. Aline listened with unconcealed pleasure to her partner's words, the elasticity of her step and a sort of general trembling made her seem like a flower swaying to the breeze, and revealed the pleasure which his conversation gave her. Every time her eyes met Octave's penetrating glance they fell, out of instinctive modesty. Each word, however indifferent it might be, rang in her ears sweet and melodious; each contact with his hand seemed to her like a tender pressing.

Gerfaut experienced a feeling of melancholy as he noticed how this fresh, innocent rose brightened up at each word he uttered and he thought:

"She would love me as I want to be loved, with all her heart, mind and soul. She would kneel before my love as before an altar, while this coquette—"

He glanced in the direction where Madame de Bergenheim was dancing with Marillac, and met her gaze fixed full upon him. The glance which he received was rapid, displeased and imperious. It signified clearly: "I forbid you to speak thus to your partner."

Octave, at that moment was not disposed to obedience. After having glanced over the quadrille as if it were by mere chance that his eyes had met Clemence's, he turned toward Aline and redoubled his amiability.

A moment later, he received not directly, but through the medium of the mirror—that so often indiscreet confidant—a second glance more somber and threatening than before.

"Very good," said he to himself as he led the young girl to her seat; "we are jealous. That alters the situation. I know now where the ramparts are the weakest and where to commence my attack."

No other incident marked the day. The guests left at night-fall and the society was reduced to the usual members of the household. Octave entered his room after supper, humming an Italian air, evidently in such good spirits that his friend was quite surprised.

"I give it up, I cannot understand your conduct," said the latter; "you have been as solemn as an owl all day, and now here you are as gay as a lark; have you had an understanding?"

"I am more vexed than ever."

"And you enjoy being so?"

"Very much."

"Ah! you are playing who loses wins!"

"Not exactly; but as my good sentiments lead to nothing, I hope to conduct myself in such a disagreeable way as to force this capricious creature to adore me."

"The devil! that is clever. Besides it is a system as good as any other. Women are such extraordinary creatures!"

"Woman," said Octave, "resembles a pendulum whose movement is a continual reaction; when it moves to the right, it has to go to the left in order to return to the right again, and so on. Suppose virtue is on one side and love on the other and the feminine balance between them, the odds are that having moved to the right in a violent manner, it will return none the less energetically to the left; for the longer a vibration has been, the greater play the contrary vibration has. In order to hasten the action of this pendulum I am going to attach to it—to act as extra balance-weight—a little anguish which I ought to have employed sooner."

"Why make her suffer since you believe that she loves you?"

"Why? because she drives me to it. Do you fancy that I torture her willingly; that I take pleasure in seeing her cheeks grow pale from insomnia and her eyes show traces of tears? I love her, I tell you; I suffer and weep with her. But I love her and I must make sure of her love. If she will leave but a road full of brambles and sharp stones for me to reach her, must I give up the struggle just because I run the risk by taking her with me, of wounding her charming feet? I will cure them with my kisses!"

"Listen to me; I am not in love; I am an artist. If I have some peculiar ideas, it is not my fault. And you, in your character of docile lover, have you decided to yield?"

"Morally."

"Very well! after all, you are right. The science of love resembles those old signs upon which one reads: 'Here, hair is dressed according to one's fancy.' If this angel wishes her hair pulled, do it for her."

CHAPTER XIII

Some men in society marry too soon, a great number too late, a small and fortunate proportion at an opportune time. Young men in the country, of good families, are generally established in marriage by their parents as early as possible. When the family council finds an heiress who answers all the conditions of the programme laid out, they commence by giving the victim his cue. Provided the young lady has not a positively crooked nose, too red arms and too uncouth a waist—sometimes even notwithstanding these little misfortunes—the transaction is concluded without any difficulty.

Clemence and Christian should be placed in the first rank of privileged couples of the above kind. The most fastidious old uncle or precise old dowager could not discover the slightest pretense for criticism. Age, social position, wealth, physical endowments all seemed united by a chance as rare as fortunate. So Mademoiselle de Corandeuil who had very high pretensions for her niece made no objections upon receiving the first overtures. She did not have, at this time, the antipathy for her future nephew's family which developed later. The Bergenheims were in her eyes very well born gentlemen. A meeting took place at a ball at the Russian Embassy. Monsieur de Bergenheim came in uniform; it was etiquette for him to do so, as the minister of war was present; but at the

same time of course, there was a little vanity on his part, for his uniform showed off his tall, athletic figure to the best advantage. Christian was certainly a very handsome soldier; his mustache and eye-brows were of a lighter tint than his complexion, and gave him that martial air which pleases ladies. Clemence could find no reason for a refusal. The way in which she had been brought up by her aunt had not rendered her so happy but that she often desired to change her position. Like the greater number of young girls she consented to become a wife so as not to remain a maiden; she said yes, so as not to say no.

As to Christian, he was in love with his wife as nine out of ten cavalry officers know how to love, and he seemed perfectly satisfied with the sentiment that he received in return for this sudden affection. A few successes with young belles, for whom an epaulette has an irresistible attraction, had inspired Baron de Bergenheim with a confidence in himself the simplicity of which excused the conceit. He persuaded himself that he pleased Clemence because she suited him exactly.

There are singers who pretend to read music at sight; give them a score by Gluck's—"I beg your pardon," they will say, 'my part is witten here in the key of 'C' and I only sing in the key of 'G'!' How many men do not know even the key of 'G' in matters of love! Unfortunately for him, Bergenheim was one of that number. After three years of married life, he had not divined the first note in Clemence's character. He decided in his own mind, at the end of a few months, that she was cold if not heartless. This discovery, which ought to have wounded his vanity, in-

spired him on the contrary with a deeper respect for her; insensibly this reserve reacted upon himself, for love is a fire whose heat dies out for want of fuel, and its cooling off is more sudden when the flame is more on the surface than in the depths.

The revolution of 1830 stopped Christian's career and gave added pretexts for temporary absences which only added to the coolness which already existed between husband and wife. After having handed in his resignation, the baron fixed his residence at his chateau in the Vosges mountains, for which he shared the hereditary predilection of his family. His tastes were in perfect harmony with this dwelling, for he had quickly become the perfect type of a country gentleman, scorning the court and rarely leaving his ancestral acres. He was too kind hearted to exact that his wife should share his country tastes and retired life. The unlimited confidence which he had in her, a loyalty which never allowed him to suppose evil or suspect her, a nature very little inclined to jealousy, made him allow Clemence the greatest liberty. The young woman lived at will in Paris with her aunt, or at Berghenheim with her husband, without its ever entering the latter's head to be suspicious. Really, what had he to fear? What wrong could she reproach him with? Was he not full of kindness and attention toward her? Did he not leave her mistress of her own fortune, free to do as she liked, to gratify every caprice? He thus lived upon his faith in the marriage contract, with unbounded confidence and old fashioned loyalty.

According to general opinion, Madame de Berghenheim was a very fortunate woman to whom virtue must be so easy that it could hardly be called a merit.

Happiness, according to society, consists in a box at the Opera, a stylish carriage and a husband who pays the bills without frowning. Add to the above privileges, a hundred thousand francs worth of diamonds, and a woman has really no right to dream or to suffer. There are, however, poor loving creatures who stifle under this happiness as if under one of those leaden covers that Dante speaks of; they breathe, in imagination, the pure vital air that a fatal instinct has revealed to them; they struggle between duty and desire; they gaze, like captive doves and with a sorrowful eye, upon the forbidden region where it would be so blissful to soar; for, in fastening a chain to their feet, the law did not bandage their eyes, and nature gave them wings; if the wings tear the chain, asunder shame and misfortune await them! Society will never forgive the heart that catches a glimpse of the joys it is unacquainted with; even a brief hour in that paradise has to be expiated by implacable social damnation and its everlasting flames.

CHAPTER XIV

There almost always comes a moment when a woman, in her combat against love, is obliged to call falsehood to the help of duty. Madame de Bergenheim had entered this terrible period in which virtue doubting its own strength does not blush to resort to other resources. At the moment when Octave, a man of experience, was seeking assistance in exciting her jealousy, she was meditating a plan of defense founded upon deceit. In order to take away all hope from her lover, she affected a sudden affection for her husband, and in spite of her secret remorse she persisted in this role for two days; but during the night her tears expiated her treachery. Christian greeted his wife's virtuous coquetry with the gratitude and eagerness of a husband who has been deprived of love more than he likes. Gerfaut was very indignant at the sight of this perfidious maneuver the intention of which he immediately divined, and his rage only wanted a provocation to break out in full force.

One evening they were all gathered together in the drawing-room with the exception of Aline, whom a reprimand from Mademoiselle de Corandeuil had exiled to her room. The old maid, stretched out in her chair, had decided to be unfaithful to her whist in favor of conversation. Marillac, leaning his elbows upon a round table, was negligently sketching some political caricatures at that time so much the fashion and par-

ticularly agreeable to the legitimist party. Christian, who was seated near his wife whose hand he was pressing with caressing familiarity, passed from one subject to another, and showed in his conversation the overwhelming conceit of a happy man who regards his happiness as a proof of superiority. Gerfaut, standing near the mantel, gazed gloomily at Clemence who leaned toward her husband and seemed to eagerly listen to his slightest word. Bergenheim was a faithful admirer of the classics as all country gentlemen are, who introduce a sentiment of propriety into their literary opinions and prefer the ancient writers to the modern, for the reason that their libraries are much richer in old works than in modern books. The baron unmercifully sacrificed Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, whom he had never read, upon the altar of Racine and Corneille, of which he possessed two or three editions, and yet it would have embarrassed him to have recited a half dozen verses from them. Marillac boldly defended the cause of contemporary literature, which he considered as a personal matter, and poured out a profusion of sarcastic remarks in which there was more wit than good taste.

"The gods fell from Olympus, why should they not also fall from Parnassus?" said the artist finally with a triumphant air. "Say what you will, Bergenheim, your feeble opposition will not prevail against the instincts of the age. The future is ours, let me tell you, and we are the high priests of the new religion; is it not so, Gerfaut?"

At these words, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil shook her head gravely.

"A new religion!" said she; "if this pretention should

be verified you would only be guilty of heresy, and without allowing myself to be taken in, I can understand how elevated minds and enthusiastic hearts might be attracted by the promises of a deceptive utopia; but you, gentlemen, whom I believe to be sincere, do you not see to what an extent you delude yourselves? What you call religion is the most absolute negation of religious principles, it is the most distressing impiety ornamented with a certain sentimental hypocrisy which has not even the courage to frankly proclaim its principles."

"I swear to you, mademoiselle, that I am religious three days out of four," replied Marillac; "that is something; there are some christians who are so only on Sunday."

"Materialism is the source from which modern literature takes its inspiration," continued the old maid; "and this poisonous stream not only dries up the thoughts which would expand toward heaven, but also withers all that is noble in human sentiment. To-day, people are not content to deny God because they are not pure enough to comprehend him; they disown even the weakness of the heart provided they have an exalted and dignified character. They believe no longer in love. All the women that your fashionable writers tell us about are vulgar and sometimes unchaste creatures to whom formerly a gentleman would have blushed to give one glance or to offer a supper. I say this for your benefit, M. de Gerfaut, for in this respect you are far from being irreproachable; and I could bring forth your books to support my theory. If I accuse you of atheism in love, what do you have to say in reply?"

Carried away by one of those impulsive emotions which men of imagination cannot resist, Octave arose and said:

"I should not deny such an accusation. Yes, it is a sad thing but true, and only weak minds recoil from the truth; there is reality only in material objects; all the rest in merely deception and fancy. All poetry is a dream, all spiritualism a fraud! Why not apply to love the accommodating philosophy which takes the world as it is, and does not throw a savory fruit into the press under the pretext of extracting I know not what imaginary essence? Two beautiful eyes, a satin skin, white teeth and a shapely foot and hand are of such positive and inestimable value! Is it not unreasonable then, to place elsewhere than in them all the wealth of love? Intellect sustains its owner, they say; no, intelligence kills. It is thought that corrupts sensation and causes suffering where, but for that, joy would reign supreme. Thought! accursed gift! Do we give or ask a thought of the rose we breathe? Why not love as we breathe? Would not woman simply considered as a perfectly organized vegetation, be the queen of creation? Why not enjoy her perfume as we bend before her leaving her clinging to the ground where she was born and lives? Why tear her from the earth, this flower so fresh, and have her wither in our hands as we raise her up like an offering? Why make of so weak and fragile a creature a being above all others, for whom our enthusiasm can find no name, and then discover her to be but an unworthy angel? Angel! yes, of course, but an angel of the Earth, not of Heaven; an angel of flesh, not of light! By dint of loving, we love wrongly. We place our mistress

too high and ourselves too low; there is never a pedestal lofty enough for her according to our ideas. Fools! Oh! reflection is always wise but desire is foolish, and our conduct is regulated by our desire. We, above all, with our active, restless minds, blasé in many respects, unbelieving in others and disrespectful in the remainder, soar over life as over an impure lake, and look at everything with contempt, seeking in love an altar before which we can humble our pride and soften our disdain. For there is in man an insurmountable need to fall on his knees before no matter what idol, if it remains standing and allows itself to be adored. At certain hours, a prayer bell rings in the depth of the heart, the sound of which throws him upon his knees as it cries: 'kneel!' And then the very being who ignores God in his churches and scorns kings upon their thrones, the being who has already exhausted the hollow idols of glory and fame, not having a temple to pray in, makes a fetich for himself in order to have a divinity to adore, so as to not to be alone in his impiety, and to see, above his head when he arises, something that shall not be empty and vacant space. This man seeks a woman, takes all that he has, talent, passion, youth, enthusiasm, all the wealth of his heart and throws them at her feet like the mantle that Raleigh spread out before Elizabeth, and he says to this woman: 'Walk, O, my queen; trample under your blessed feet the heart of your adored slave!' This man is a fool, is he not? For, when the queen has passed, what remains upon the mantle? Mud!"

Gerfaut accompanied these words with such a withering glance that the one for whom they were intended felt her blood freeze in her veins, and withdrew the

hand her husband had kept till then in his; she soon arose and seated herself at the other side of the table under the pretext of getting nearer the lamp to work, but in reality, so as to withdraw from Christian's vicinity. Clemence had expected her lover's anger, but not his scorn; she had not the strength to endure this torture, and the conjugal love which had, not without difficulty, inflamed her heart for the last few days fell to ashes at the first breath of Octave's indignation.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil greeted the vicomte's words indulgently; for, from consummate pride, she separated herself from other women.

"So then," said she, "you pretend that if to-day love is painted under false and vulgar colors, the fault is the model's, not the artist's."

"You express my thought much better than I could have done myself," said Gerfaut in an ironical tone; "where are the angels whose portraits are called for?"

"They are in our poetical dreams," said Marillac, raising his eyes to the ceiling with an inspired air.

"Very well! tell us your dreams then, instead of copying a reality which it is impossible for you to render poetic, since you yourselves see it without illusions."

Gerfaut smiled bitterly at this suggestion, artlessly uttered by the baron.

"My dreams," replied he, "I should tell them to you poorly indeed, for the first blessing of the awakening is forgetfulness, and to-day, I am awake. However, I remember how I allowed myself to be once overcome by a dream that has now vanished, but still emits its luminous trail in my eyes. I thought I had

discovered, under a beautiful and attractive appearance, the richest treasure that the earth can bestow upon the heart of man; I thought I had discovered a soul, that divine mystery, deep as the ocean, ardent as a flame, pure as air, glorious as heaven itself, infinite as space, immortal as eternity! It was another universe, where I should be king. With what ardent and holy love I attempted the conquest of this new world, but, less fortunate than Columbus, I met with shipwreck instead of triumph."

Clemence, at this avowal of her lover's defeat, threw him a glance of intense contradiction, then lowered her eyes, for she felt her face suffused with burning blushes.

When he entered his room that night, Gerfaut went straight to the window. He could see in the darkness the light which gleamed in Clemence's room.

"She is alone," said he to himself; "certainly heaven protects us, for in the state of exasperation I am in, I should have killed them both."

CHAPTER XV

Far from rejoicing at this moment in the triumph he had just obtained, Gerfaut fell into one of those attacks of disenchantment, during which, urged on by some unknown demon, he unmercifully administered to himself his own dreaded sarcasm. Being unable to sleep, he arose and opened his window again, and remained with his elbows resting upon the sill for some time. The night was calm, numberless stars twinkled in the heavens, the moon bathed with its silvery light the tops of the trees, through which a monotonous breeze softly rustled. After having gazed at this melancholy picture of sleeping nature, the poet smiled disdainfully and said to himself:

"This comedy must end. I cannot waste my life thus. Doubtless, glory is a dream as well as love; to pass the night idiotically gazing at the moon and stars, is after all as reasonable as to grow pale over a work destined to live a day, a year or a century! for what renown lasts longer than that? If I were really loved, I should not regret those wasted hours; but is it true that I am loved? There are moments when I recover my coolness and clearness of mind, a degree of self-possession incompatible with the enthusiasm of genuine passion; at other times, it is true, a sudden agitation renders me powerless and leaves me as weak as a child—Oh, yes, I love her in a strange manner; the sentiment that I feel for her has become a study of

the mind as well as an emotion of the heart, and that is what gives it its despotic tenacity; for a material impression weakens and gradually dies out, but when an energetic intelligence is brought to bear upon it, it becomes desperate. I should be wrong to complain. Passion, a passive sentiment! This word has a contradictory meaning for me; I am a lover as Napoleon was an emperor: nobody forced the crown upon him, he took it and crowned himself with his own hand. If my crown happens to be a thorny one, whom can I accuse? did not my brow crave it?

"I have loved this woman of my own choosing, above all others; the choice made, I have worked at my love as I would at a cherished poem; it has been the subject of all my meditations, the fairy of all my dreams, for more than a year. I have not had a thought in which I have not paid her homage. I have devoted my talents to her; it seemed to me that by loving and perpetually contemplating her image, I might at last become worthy of painting it. I was conscious of a grand future, if only she had understood me; I often thought of Raphael and his own Fornarina. There is a throne vacant in poetry; I had dreamed of this throne in order to lay it at Clemence's feet. Oh! although this may never be but a dream, this dream has given me hours of incomparable happiness! I should be ungrateful to deny it.

"And yet this love is only a fictitious sentiment; I realize it to-day. It is not with her that I am in love, it is with a woman created by my imagination, and whom I clearly see within this unfeeling marble shape. When we have meditated for a long time, our thoughts end by taking life and walking by our side.

I can now understand the allegory of Adam taking Eve from his own substance; but flesh forms a palpitating flesh akin to itself; the mind only creates a shadow, and a shadow cannot animate a dead body. Two dead bodies cannot make a living one; a body without a soul is only a cadaver—and she has no soul."

Gerfaut sat motionless for some time with his face buried in his hands; suddenly he raised his head and burst into a harsh laughter.

"Enough of this soaring in the clouds!" he exclaimed; "let us come down to earth again. It is permissible to think in verse but one must act in prose, and that is what I shall do to-morrow. This woman's caprices, which she takes for efforts of virtue, have made of me a cruel and inexorable man; I have begged in vain for peace; if she wishes war; very well, so be it, she shall have war."

CHAPTER XVI

For several days, Gerfaut followed, with unrelenting perseverance, the plan which he had mapped out in that eventful night. The most exacting woman could but appear satisfied with the politeness he displayed toward Madame de Bergenheim, but nothing in his conduct showed the slightest desire for an explanation. He was so careful of every look, gesture and word of his, that it would have been impossible to discover the slightest difference in his actions toward Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, and the manner in which he treated Clemence. His choicest attentions and most particular efforts at amiability were bestowed upon Aline. He used as much caution as cunning, in his little game, for he knew that in spite of her inclination to be jealous, Madame de Bergenheim would never believe in a sudden desertion, and that she would surely discover the object of his ruse, if he would make the mistake of exaggerating it in the least.

While renouncing the idea of a direct attack, he did not work with any less care to fortify his position. He redoubled his activity in widening the breach between the old aunt and the husband, following the principles of military art, that one should become master of the exterior works of a stronghold before seriously attacking its ramparts.

It was, in a way, by reflection that Octave's passion reached Clemence. Every few moments, she learned

some detail of this indirect attack, to which it was impossible for her to raise any objections.

"M. de Gerfaut has promised to spend a fortnight longer with us," said her aunt to her in a jeering tone.

"Really, Gerfaut is very obliging," said her husband in his turn; "he thinks it very strange that we have not had a genealogical tree made to put in the drawing-room. He pretends that it is an indispensable complement to my collection of family portraits, and he offers to do me the favor of assuming charge of it. It seems, from what your aunt tells me, that he is very learned in heraldry. Would you believe it, he spent the whole morning in the library looking over files of old manuscripts? I am delighted, for this will prolong his stay here. He is a very charming fellow; a liberal in politics, but a gentleman at heart. Marillac, who is a superb penman, undertakes to make a fair copy of the genealogy and to illuminate the crests. Do you know, we cannot find my great grandmother Cantelescar's coat of arms? But tell me, my darling, it seems to me that you are not very kindly disposed toward your cousin Gerfaut?"

Madame de Bergenheim, when these remarks and various others of a similar nature came up, tried to change the conversation, but she felt an antipathy for her husband bordering upon aversion. For, lack of intelligence is one of the faults women can pardon the least; they look upon a confidence which is lulled into security by faith in their honor and a blindness which does not suspect the possibility of a fall, as positive crimes.

"Look at these pretty verses M. de Gerfaut has written in my album, Clemence," said Aline in her turn.

During vacation, among her other pleasures forbidden her at the 'Sacred Heart,' the young girl had purchased a superbly bound album, containing so far, but two ugly sketches in sepia, one very bad attempt in water colors, and the verses in question. She called this 'my album!' as she called a certain little blank book, 'my diary!' To the latter she confided every night the important events of the day. This book had assumed such proportions during the last few days, that it threatened to reach the dimensions of the Duchess d'Abrantes' memoires, but if the album was free to public admiration, nobody ever saw the diary and Justine herself had never been able to discover the sanctuary which concealed this mysterious manuscript.

Aline was not so pleasantly received as the others, and Madame de Bergenheim scarcely concealed the ill-humor her pretty sister-in-law's beaming face caused her every time Octave's name was mentioned.

The latter's diplomatic conduct was bearing fruit, and his expectations were being fulfilled with a precision which proved the correctness of his calculations. In the midst of all the contradictory sentiments of fear, remorse vexation, love and jealousy, Clemence's head was so turned, at times, that she did not know what she did want. She found herself in one of those situations when a woman of a complex and mobile character whom all sensations impress, passes, with surprising facility, from one resolve to another entirely opposed to it. After having been frightened beyond measure by her lover's presence in her husband's house, she ended by becoming accustomed to it, and then by ridiculing her first terror.

"Truly," thought she at times, "I was too silly to thus torment myself and make myself ill; I was wanting in self-respect to mistrust myself to such an extent, and to see danger where there was none. He cannot expect to make himself so very formidable while scrawling this geneological tree. If he came one hundred leagues from Paris for that, he really does not merit such severe treatment."

Then, after having thus reassured herself against the perils of her position, without realizing that to fear danger less was to embolden love, she proceeded to examine her lover's conduct.

"He seems perfectly resigned," said she to herself; "not one word or glance for two days! Since he resigns himself so easily, he might, it seems to me, obey me entirely and go away; or if he wishes to disobey me, he might do it in a less disagreeable manner. For really, his manner is almost rude; he might at least remember that I am his hostess, and that he is in my house. I do not see what pleasure he can take in talking to this little girl. I wager that his only object is to annoy me! He deceives himself most assuredly; it is all the same to me! But Aline takes all this seriously! She has become very coquettish, the last few days! It certainly is very wrong for him to try to turn this child's head. I should like to know what he would say to justify himself."

Thus, little by little, she mentally reached the point where Octave wished to bring her. The desire for an explanation with him which she dared not admit to herself at first from a feeling of pride, became greater from day to day, and at last Octave himself could not have longed more ardently for an interview. Now

that Octave seemed to forget her, she realized that she loved him almost to adoration. She reproached herself for her harshness toward him more than she had ever reproached herself for her weakness. Her antipathy for all that did not concern him increased to such a degree, that the most simple of household duties became odious to her. It seemed to her that all the people about her were enemies bent upon separating her from happiness; for happiness was Octave; and this happiness made up of words, letters, glances from him, was lost!

The evening of the fourth day, she found this torture beyond her strength.

"I shall become insane," thought she; "to-morrow I will speak to him."

Gerfaut was saying to himself, at nearly the same moment: "To-morrow I will have a talk with her." Thus, by a strange sympathy, their hearts seemed to understand each other in spite of their separation. But what was an irresistible attraction in Clemence was only a determination resulting from almost a mathematical calculation on her lover's part. By the aid of this gift of second sight which intelligent men who are in love sometimes possess, he had followed, degree by degree, the variation of her heart, without her saying one word, and in spite of the veil of scorn and indifference which she still had the courage to shield herself with, he had not lost a single one of the tortures she had endured for the last four days. Now he thought that he had discovered enough to allow him to risk a step that, until then, he would have deemed dangerous; and with the egotism common to all men, even the best of lovers, he trusted in the weakness born of sorrow.

The next day a hunting party was arranged with some of the neighbors. Early in the morning, Bergenheim and Marillac started for the rendezvous which was at the foot of the large oak tree where the artist's tête-à-tête had been so cruelly interrupted. Gerfaut refused to join them under the pretense of finishing an article for the *Revue de Paris*, and remained at home with the three ladies. As soon as dinner was ended, he went to his room in order to give a semblance of truth to the excuse he had made use of.

He had been busying himself for some time trimming a quill pen at the window which looked out upon the park, when he saw in the garden, directly beneath him, Constance's fore feet and nose; soon the dog jumped upon the sill in order to warm herself in the sun.

"The old lady has entered her sanctuary," thought Gerfaut, who knew that it was as impossible to see Constance without her mistress as Saint Roch without his dog.

A moment later he saw Justine and Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's maid starting off, arm in arm, as if they were going for a promenade. Finally, he had hardly written half a page, when he noticed Aline opposite his window, with a straw hat upon her head and a watering pot in her hand. A servant carried a bucket of water and placed it near a mass of dahlias, which the young girl had taken under her protection, and she at once set about her work with great zeal.

"Now," said Gerfaut, "let us see if the place is approachable." And closing his desk, he stealthily descended the stairs.

After crossing the vestibule on the first floor, and a

small gallery decorated with commonplace pictures, he found himself at the library door. Thanks to the genealogical tree which he had promised to compile, he possessed a key to this room which was not usually open. By dint of preaching about the danger in certain reading for young girls, Mademoiselle de Coran-deuil had caused this system of locking-up, especially destined to preserve Aline from the temptation of opening certain novels which the old maid rejected en masse. "Young girls did not read novels in 1780," she would say. This put an end to all discussion and cut short the protestations of the young girl, who was brought up exclusively upon a diet of *Le Ragois* and *Mentelle's* geography, and such solid mental food.

Several large books and numerous manuscripts were spread out upon the table in the library, together with a wide sheet of Holland paper upon which was sketched the family tree of the *Bergenheims*. Instead of going to work, however, Gerfaut locked the door and then went across the room and pressed a little knob which opened a small door no one would have noticed at first. Leather bands representing the binding of books like those which covered the rest of the library walls, made it necessary for one to be informed of the existence of this secret exit in order to distinguish it from the rest of the room. This door had had a singular attraction for Gerfaut ever since the day he first discovered it. After silently opening it, he found himself in a small passage at the end of which was a small spiral stair-case leading to the floor above. A cat hoping to surprise a bird asleep could not have walked more stealthily than he did as he mounted the stairs.

When he crossed the last step, he found himself in a

small room, filled with wardrobes, lighted by a small glass door covered with a muslin curtain. This door opened into a little parlor which separated Madame de Bergenheim's private sitting room from her sleeping apartment. The only window was opposite the closet and occupied almost the whole of the wood work, the rest of which was hung with pearl grey stuff with lilac figures upon it. A broad, low divan covered with the same material as the hanging, occupied the space in front of the window. It was the only piece of furniture and it seemed almost impossible to introduce even one chair more.

The blinds were carefully closed as well as the double curtains, and they let in so little light that Octave had to accustom himself to the obscurity before he could distinguish Madame de Bergenheim through the muslin curtains and the glass door. She was lying upon the divan with her head turned in his direction and a book in her hand. He first thought her asleep, but soon noticed her gleaming eyes fastened upon the ceiling.

"She is not asleep, she does not read, then she is thinking of me!" said he to himself, by a logical deduction he believed incontestable.

After a moment's hesitation, seeing that the young woman remained motionless, Gerfaut tried to turn the handle of the door as softly as possible so as to make his entrance quietly. The bolt had just noiselessly slipped in the lock when the drawing room door suddenly opened, a flood of light inundated the floor and Aline appeared upon the threshold watering pot in hand.

The young girl stopped an instant for she thought

her sister-in-law was asleep; but, meeting in the shade Clemence's sparkling eyes, she entered saying in a fresh silvery voice:

"All my flowers are doing well; I have come to water yours."

Madame de Bergenheim made no reply but her eyebrows contracted slightly as she watched the young girl kneel before a superb datura. This almost imperceptible symptom, and the rather ill-humored look foretold a storm. A few drops of water falling upon the floor, gave her the needed pretext, and Gerfaut, as much in love as he was, could not help but think of the fable of the wolf and the lamb when he heard the lady of his thoughts exclaim in an impatient tone:

"Let those flowers alone; they do not need to be watered. Do you not see that you are wetting the floor?"

Aline turned around and looked at the scolder for a moment; then, placing her watering pot upon the floor, she darted toward the divan like a kitten who has just received a blow from its mother's paw and feels authorized to play with her. Madame de Bergenheim tried to rise at this unexpected attack; but before she could sit up, she was thrown back upon the cushions by the young girl who seized both of her hands and kissed her on each cheek.

"Good gracious! how cross you have been for the last few days!" cried Aline pressing her sister's hands. "Are you going to be like your aunt? You do nothing but scold now. What have I done? Are you vexed with me? Do you not love me any longer?"

Clemence felt a sort of remorse, at this question asked with such a loving accent; but her jealousy she

could not overcome. To make up for it, she kissed her sister-in-law with a show of affection which seemed to satisfy the latter.

"What are you reading?" asked the young girl picking up the book which had fallen to the floor in their struggle—"Notre Dame de Paris"; that must be interesting! Will you let me read it? Oh! do! will you?"

"You know very well that my aunt has forbidden you to read novels."

"Oh! she does that just to annoy me and for no other reason. Do you think that is right? Must I remain an idiot and never read anything but history and geography the rest of my life? As if I did not know that Louis XIII was the son of Henri IV, and that there are eighty-six departments in France. You read novels. Does it do you any harm?"

Clemence replied in rather an imperative tone of voice which ought to have put an end to the discussion:

"When you are married you can do as you like. Until then, you must leave your education in the hands of those who are interested in you."

"All of my friends," replied Aline with a pout, "have relatives who are interested in them, at least, as much as your aunt is in me, and they do not prevent their reading the books they want to. There is Claire de Saponay who has read all of Walter Scott's novels, Maleck-Adel, Eugenie and Mathilde—and I do not know how many more—Gessner, Mademoiselle de Lafayette—She has read everything, and I, they have let me read Numa Pompilius, and Paul and Virginia. If that isn't ridiculous at sixteen years of age!"

"Now then, do not get excited, but go into the

library and get one of Walter Scott's novels; but do not let my aunt know anything about it."

At this act of capitulation by which Madame de Bergenheim doubtless wished to atone for her disagreeableness, Aline made one joyous bound for the glass door. Gerfaut barely had time to leave his post of observation and to conceal himself between two wardrobes under a cloak which was hanging there, when the young girl made her appearance, but she paid no attention to the pair of legs which were but imperfectly concealed. She bounded down the stairs and returned a moment later with the precious volumes in her hand.

"Waverly, or Scotland sixty years ago," said she as she read the title. "I took the first one on the shelf, because you are going to lend them all to me, one by one, are you not? Claire says that a young girl can read Walter Scott and that his books are very nice."

"We will see if you are sensible," replied Clemence smiling; "but, above all things, do not let my aunt see these books, for I am the one who would get the scolding."

"Do not worry, I will go and hide them in my room."

She went as far as the door and then stopped and came back a few steps.

"It seems," said she, "that M. de Gerfaut worked in the library yesterday, for there are piles of books on the table. It is very kind of him to be willing to make this tree, is it not? Shall we both be in it? Do they put women in such things? I hope your aunt will not be there; she is not one of the family."

Clemence's face clouded up again at the name of Gerfaut.

"I know no more about it than you do," replied she a little harshly.

"The reason I asked is because there are only pictures of men in the drawing-room; it is not very polite on their part. I should much prefer that there should be portraits of our grand-mothers; it would be so amusing to see the beautiful dresses that they wore in those days rather than those old beards which frighten me. But perhaps they do not put young girls in genealogical trees," continued she in a musing tone.

"You might ask M. de Gerfaut; he wishes to please you too much to refuse to tell you," said Clemence with an almost ironical smile.

"Do you think so?" asked Aline innocently, "I should never dare to ask him."

"You are still afraid of him then?"

"A little," replied the young girl lowering her eyes, for she felt her face flush.

This symptom made Madame de Bergenheim more vexed than ever, and she continued in a cutting, sarcastic tone:

"Has your cousin d'Artigues written you lately?"

Mademoiselle de Bergenheim raised her eyes and looked at her for a moment with an indifferent air:

"I don't know," she said at last.

"What! you do not know whether you have received a letter from your cousin?" continued Clemence laughing affectedly.

"Ah! Alphonse—no, that is, yes; but it was a long time ago."

"How cold and indifferent you are all of a sudden to this dear Alphonse! You do not remember then,

how you wept at his departure, a year ago, and how vexed you were with your brother who tried to tease you about this beautiful affection, and how you swore that you would never have any other husband but your cousin?"

"I was a simpleton and Christian was right. Alphonse is only one year older than I! Think of it, what a fine couple we should make! I know that I am not very sensible, and so it is necessary that my husband should be wise enough for us both. Christian is nine years older than you, is he not?"

"Do you think that is too much?" asked Madame de Bergenheim.

"Quite the contrary."

"What age should you like your husband to be?"

"Oh!—thirty," replied the young girl after a slight hesitation.

"M. de Gerfaut's age?"

They gazed at each other in silence. Octave, who from his place of concealment, was hearing the whole of this conversation, noticed the sad expression which passed over Clemence's face, and seemed to provoke entire confidence. The young girl allowed herself to be caught by this appearance of interest and affection.

"I will tell you something," said she; "if you will promise never to tell a soul."

"Who should I repeat it to? You know that I am very discreet as to your little secrets."

"It is because this might be perhaps a great secret," continued Aline.

Clemence took her sister-in-law's hand and drew her down beside her.

"You know," said Aline, "that Christian has promised

to give me a watch like yours, because I do not like mine. Yesterday, when we were out walking, I told him I thought it was very unkind of him not to have given it to me yet. Do you know what he replied?—It is true that he laughed a little—‘It is hardly worth while buying you one now; when you are the vicomtesse de Gerfaut, your husband will get you one.’”

“Your brother was joking at your expense; how could you be such a child as not to have perceived it?”

“I am not such a child!” exclaimed Aline rising with a vexed air; “I know what I have seen. They have been talking a long time together in the drawing-room last evening and I am sure they were speaking of me.”

Madame de Bergenheim burst into a laughter which increased her sister-in-law’s vexation, for she was less and less disposed to be treated like a young girl.

“Poor Aline!” said the baroness at last; “they were talking about the fifth portrait; M. de Gerfaut cannot find the name of the original among the old papers and he thinks he did not belong to the family. You know, that old face with the gray beard, near the door.”

The young girl bent her head like a child who sees her naughty sister throw down her castle of cards.

“And how do you know?” said she after a moment’s reflection. “You were at the piano. How could you hear at the other end of the room what M. de Gerfaut was saying?”

It was Clemence’s turn to hang her head, for it seemed to her that the girl had suspected the constant attention which, under an affectation of indifference, never allowed her to lose one of Octave’s words. As usual, she concealed her embarrassment by redoubling her sarcasm.

"Very likely," said she, "I was mistaken, and you may be right after all. What day shall we have the honor of saluting Madame la vicomtesse de Gerfaut?"

"I foolishly told you what I imagined, and you at once make fun of me," said Aline, whose round face lengthened at each word, and passed from rose color to scarlet, "is it my fault that my brother said this?"

"I do not think it was necessary for him to speak of it, for you to think a great deal about the matter."

"Very well; must one not think of something?"

"But one should be careful of one's thoughts; it is not proper for a young girl to think of any man," replied Clemence with an accent of severity which would have made her aunt recognize with pride the pure blood of the Corandeuils.

"I think it is more proper for a young girl than for a married woman to do so."

At this unexpected retort, Madame de Bergenheim lost countenance and sat speechless before the young maiden like a scholar who has just been punished by his teacher.

"Where in the devil did the little serpent get that idea?" thought Gerfaut, who was very ill at ease between the two ward-robcs where he was concealed.

Seeing that her sister-in-law did not reply to her, Aline took this silence from confusion for an expression of bad temper, and at once became angry in her turn.

"You are very cross to-day," said she, "good bye, I do not want your books."

She threw the volumes of "Waverly" upon the sofa, picked up her watering-pot and went out closing the door with a loud bang. Madame de Bergenheim sat motionless with a pensive, gloomy air as if the

young girl's remark had changed her into a statue.

"Shall I enter?" said Octave to himself, leaving his niche and putting his hand upon the doorknob. "This little simpleton has done me an infinite wrong with her silly speeches. I am sure that she is cruising with full sails set upon the stormy sea of remorse, and that those two rosebuds she is gazing at now seem to her like her husband's eyes."

Before the poet could make up his mind what to do, the baroness arose and left the room, closing the door almost as noisily as her sister-in-law had done.

Gerfaut went down stairs cursing from the very depths of his heart, boarding-school misses and sixteen-year-old hearts. After walking up and down the library for a few moments, he left it and started to return to his room. As he passed the drawing-room, loud music reached his ear; chromatic fire-works, scales running with the rapidity of the cataract of Niagara, extraordinary arpeggios, hammering in the bass with a petulance and frenzy which proved that the *furia francese* is not the exclusive right of the stronger sex. In this jumble of grave, wild and sad notes, Gerfaut recognized, by the clearness of touch and brilliancy of some of the passages, that this improvisation could not come from Aline's unpracticed fingers. He understood that the piano must be at this moment Madame de Bergenheim's confidant and that she was pouring out the contradictory emotions which she had indulged in for several days; for, to a heart deprived of another heart in which to confide its joys and woes, music is a friend that listens and replies.

Gerfaut listened, for some time, in silence, with his head leaning against the drawing-room door. Clem-

ence wandered through vague melodies without fixing upon any one in particular. At last a thought seemed to captivate her. After playing the first measures of the "Willow" romance from "Othello," she resumed the motive with more precision, and when she had finished the ritornello, she commenced to sing in a soft veiled voice:

"Assisa al pie d'un salice—"

Gerfaut had heard her sing this several times, in society, but never with this depth of expression. She sang before strangers with her lips; now it all came from her heart. At the third verse, when he believed her to be exalted by her singing and the passion exhaled in this exquisite song, the poet softly entered judging it to be a favorable moment; and enough agitated himself to believe in the contagion of his agitation.

The first sight which met his eyes was Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stretched out in her arm chair, head thrown back, arms drooping and letting escape by way of accompaniment a whistling, crackling, nasal melody. The old maid's glasses hanging on the end of her nose had singularly compromised the harmony of her false front. The *Gazette de France* had fallen from her hands and decorated the back of Constance, who, as usual, was lying at her mistress' feet.

"Horrible old witch!" said Gerfaut to himself. "Decidedly, the fates are against me to-day." However, as both mistress and dog were sleeping soundly, he closed the door and tiptoed across the floor.

Madame de Bergenheim had ceased to sing, but her fingers still continued to softly play the motive of the song. As she saw Octave approaching her, she leaned

over to look at her aunt whom she had not noticed to be asleep, as the high back of her chair was turned towards her. Nobody sleeps in a very imposing manner, but the old maid's profile, with her false front away, was so comical that it was too much for her niece's gravity. The desire to laugh was, for the moment, stronger than respect for melancholy; and Clemence, through that necessity for sympathy peculiar to acute merriment, glanced involuntarily to Octave who was also smiling. Although there was nothing sentimental in this exchange of thoughts, the latter hastened to profit by it; a moment more, and he was seated upon a stool in front of the piano, on her left and only a few inches from her.

"How can a person sleep when you are singing?"

The most embarrassed freshman could have turned out as bright a speech as this; but the eloquence of it lay less in the words than in the expression. The ease and grace with which Octave seated himself, the elegant precision of his manner, the gracious way in which he bent his head towards Clemence, while speaking, showed a great aptitude in this kind of conversation. If the words were those of a freshman, the accent and pose were those of a graduate.

The baroness' first thought was to rise and leave the room, but an invincible charm held her back. She was not mistress enough of her eyes to dare to let them meet Octave's; so she turned them away and pretended to look at the old maid.

"I have a particular talent for putting my aunt to sleep," said she in a gay tone; "she will sleep until evening, if I like; when I stop playing, the silence awakens her."

"I beg of you, continue to play; never awake her," said Gerfaut; and as if he were afraid his wish would not be granted, he commenced to pound in the bass without being disturbed by the unmusical sounds.

"Do not play discords," said Clemence laughing, "let us at least put her to sleep in tune."

She was wrong to say *us*; for her lover took this as complicity for whatever might happen. *Us*, in a tete-a-tete, is the most traitorous word in the whole language.

It may be that Clemence had no great desire that her aunt should awaken; perhaps she wished to avoid a conversation; perhaps she wished to enjoy in silence the happiness of feeling that she was yet loved, for since he had seated himself beside her Octave's slightest action had become a renewed avowal. Madame de Bergenheim commenced to play the "Duke of Reichstadt's Waltz" striking only the first measure of the accompaniment, in order to show her lover where to put his fingers.

The waltz commenced. Clemence played the air and Octave the bass, two of their hands remaining unoccupied, the ones which were closer to each other. Now what could two idle hands do, when one belonged to a man deeply in love, the other to a young woman who for sometime had ill-treated her lover and exhausted her severity? Before the end of the first part, the long unoccupied, tapering fingers of the treble were imprisoned by those of the bass, without the least disturbance in the musical effect—and the old aunt slept on—

A moment later, Octave's lips were fastened upon this rather trembling hand, as if he wished to imbibe to the very depths of his soul the soft perfumed tissue.

Twice the baroness tried to disengage herself, twice her strength failed her. It was beginning to be time for the aunt to awaken, but she slept more soundly than ever; and if a slight indecision was to be noticed in the upper hand, the lower notes were struck with an energy capable of metamorphosizing Mademoiselle de Corandeuil into a second sleeping beauty.

When Octave had softly caressed this hand for a long time, he raised his head in order to obtain a new favor. This time Madame de Bergenheim did not turn away her eyes, but after looking at Octave for an instant she said to him in a coquettish, seductive way:

"Aline?"

The mute glance which replied to this question was such an eloquent denial that all words were superfluous. His sweet knowing smile betrayed the secret of his duplicity; he was understood and forgiven. There was at this moment no longer any doubt, fear or struggle between them. They did not feel the necessity of any explanation as to the mutual suffering they had undergone; the suffering no longer existed. They were silent for some time, happy to look at each other, to be together and alone—for the old aunt slept on. Not a sound was to be heard, one would have said that sleep also had overcome the two lovers. Suddenly the charm was broken by a terrible noise, like a trumpet calling the guilty ones to repentance.

CHAPTER XVII

If a cannon-ball had struck the two lovers in the midst of their ecstasy it would have been less cruel than the sensation caused by this horrible noise. Clemence trembled and fell back in her chair, frozen with horror. Gerfaut rose up almost as frightened as she; Mademoiselle de Corandeuil aroused from her sleep, sat up in her chair as suddenly as one of those "Jacks in a box" that jump in one's face when a spring is touched. As to Constance, she darted under her mistress' chair uttering the most piteous howls.

One of the folding doors opposite the window opened; the bell of a hunting horn appeared in the opening, blown at full blast and waking the echoes in the drawing-room. The curtain of the drama had risen upon a parody; a second incident had changed the pantomime and sentiments of the performers. The old maid fell back in her chair and stopped up her ears with her fingers as she stamped upon the floor; but it was in vain for her to try to speak, her words were drowned by the racket made by this terrible instrument. Clemence also stopped her ears. After having run, in her terror, under every chair in the oom, Constance half wild, darted in a fit of despair, through the partly opened door. Gerfaut finally began to laugh heartily as if he thought it all great fun, for M. de Bergenheim's purple face took the place of the

trumpet and his hearty laugh rang out almost as noisily.

"Ah! ha! you did not expect that kind of an accompaniment," said the baron when his gayety had calmed a little; "this is the article that you were obliged to write for the *Revue de Paris*, is it? Do you think that I am going to leave you to sing Italian duets with madame while I am scouring the woods? You must take me for a very careless husband, vicomte—Now then, right about face! march! Do me the kindness to take a gun. We are going to shoot a few hares in the Corne woods before supper."

"Monsieur de Bergenheim," exclaimed the old maid when her emotion would allow her to speak, "this is indecorous—vulgar—the conduct of a common soldier—of a cannibal—My head is split open; I am sure to have an awful neuralgia in a quarter of an hour—It is the conduct of a herdsman."

"Do not think of your neuralgia, my dear aunt," replied Christian, whose good humor seemed aroused by the day's sport; "you are as fresh as a rose bud—and Constance shall have some hares' heads roasted for her supper."

At this moment a second uproar was heard in the court yard; a horn evidently being played by an amateur, accompanied by the confused yelps and barks of a numerous pack of hounds; the whole was mingled with shouts of laughter, the cracking of whips and clamors of all kinds. In the midst of this racket, a cry, more piercing than the others, rang out, a cry of agony and despair.

"Constance!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil in a falsetto voice full of terror; she rushed to one of the windows and all followed her.

The spectacle in the court yard was as noisy as it was picturesque. Marillac, seated upon a bench, was blowing upon a trumpet trying to play the waltz from Robert-le-Diable in true infernal manner. At his feet were seven or eight hunters and as many servants encouraging him by their shouts. The baron's pack of hounds, of great renown in the country, was composed of about forty dogs all stamped upon their right thighs with the Bergenheim coat of arms. From time immemorial, the chateau's dogs had been branded thus with their master's crest, and Christian, who was a great stickler for old customs, had taken care not to drop this one. This feudal sign had probably acted upon the morals of the pack, for it was impossible to find, within twenty leagues, a collection of more snarly terriers, dissolute hounds, ugly blood-hounds, or more quarrelsome grey-hounds; perfect hunters, however, but it seemed as if on account of their being dogs of quality all vices were permitted them.

It was in the midst of this horde without respect for law or order, that the unfortunate Constance had found herself after crossing the ante-chamber, vestibule, and outside steps still pursued by the sounds from Christian's huge horn. An honest merchant, surprised at the turn of the road by a band of robbers would not have been greeted any better than the poodle was at the moment she darted head first into the yard. It may be that the quarrel between the Bergenheims and Corandeuils had reached the canine species; it may be at the instigation of the footmen who all cordially detested the beast—the sad fact remains that she, was pounced upon in a moment as if she were a deer, snatched, turned topsy-turvy, rolled, kicked about and

bitten by the forty four-legged brigands who each seemed determined to carry away as a trophy some portion of her cafe au lait colored blanket.

The person who took the most delight in this deplorable spectacle was Pere Rousselet. He clapped actually his hands together behind his back, spread his legs apart in the attitude of the Colossus of Rhodes, while his coat skirts almost touched the ground, giving him the look of a kangaroo resting his paws under his tail. From his large cuckatoo mouth escaped provoking hisses which encouraged the assassins in their crime as much as Marillac's racket did.

"Constance"! exclaimed a second time, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, frozen with horror at the sight of her poodle lying upon its back in the midst of its enemies.

This call produced no effect upon the animal section of the actors in this scene, but it caused a sudden change among the servants and a few of the hunters; the shouts of encouragement ceased at once; several of the participants tried to prudently eclipse themselves; as to Rousselet, more politic than the others, he boldly darted into the melee and picked up the fainting puppy in his arms, carrying her as tenderly as a mother would an infant, without troubling himself whether or not he was leaving part of his coat tails with the savage hounds.

When the old maid saw the object of her love placed at her feet covered with mud, sprinkled with blood and uttering stifled groans which she took for the death rattle, she fell back in her chair speechless.

"Let us go," said Bergenheim in a low voice, taking his guest by the arm. Gerfaut threw a glance

around him and sought Clemence's eyes but he did not find them. Without troubling herself as to her aunt's despair, Clemence had hurried to her room; for she felt the necessity of solitude in order to calm her emotions, or perhaps to live them over again a second time. Octave resigned himself to following his companion. At the end of a few moments, the barking of the dogs, the joking of the hunters, even the wind in the trees and the rustling leaves, had bored Octave to such an extent that, in spite of himself, his face betrayed him.

"What a doleful face you have on!" exclaimed his host laughingly. "I am sorry that I took you away from Madame de Bergenheim; it seems that you decidedly prefer her society to ours."

"Would you be very jealous, if I were to admit the fact?" replied Octave making an effort to assume the same laughing tone as the baron.

"Jealous no, upon my honor; however, you are well constituted to give umbrage to a poor husband. But jealousy is not one of my traits of character, nor among my principles."

"You are philosophical!" said the lover with a forced smile.

"My philosophy is very simple. I respect my wife too much to suspect her, and I love her too much to annoy her in advance with an imaginary trouble. If this trouble did come and I were sure of it, it would be time enough to worry myself about it. Besides, it would be an affair soon settled."

"What affair?" asked Marillac, slackening his pace in order to join in the conversation.

"A foolish affair, my friend, which does not concern

you, M. de Gerfaut, nor myself any longer, I hope; although I belong to the class exposed to danger. We were speaking of conjugal troubles."

The artist threw a glance at his friend which signified: "What the deuce made you take it into your head to start up this hare?"

"There are many things to be said on this subject," said he in a sententious tone, thinking that his intervention might be useful in getting his friend out of the awkward position in which he found himself, "there are an infinite number of things to be said; books without number have been written upon this subject. Every one has his own system and plan of conduct as to the way of looking at and acting upon it."

"And what would be yours, you consummate villain?" asked Christian; "would you be as cruel a husband as you are an immoral bachelor? That usually happens; the bolder a poacher one has been, the more intractable a gamekeeper one becomes. What would be your system?"

"Hum! hum! you are mistaken, Bergenheim; my boyish love adventures have disposed me to indulgence. *Debilis caro*, you know, Shakspeare has translated it; Frailty, thy name is woman!"

"I am a little rusty in my Latin and I never knew a word of English. What does that mean?"

"Upon my word, it means, if I were married and my wife deceived me, I would resign myself to it like a gentleman, considering the fragility of this enchanting sex."

"Mere boy's talk, my friend! And you, Gerfaut?"

"I must admit," replied the latter a little embar-

rassed, "that I have never given the subject very much thought. However, I believe in the virtue of women."

"That's all right, but in case of misfortune, what would you do?"

"I think I should say with Lanoue: 'Sensation is for the fop, complaints for the fool, an honest man who is deceived goes away, and says nothing.'"

"I partly agree with Lanoue; only I should make a little variation, instead of *goes away* should say *avenges himself*."

Marillac threw at his friend a second glance full of meaning.

"*Per Bacco!*" said he, "are you a Venetian or Castilian husband?"

"Eh!" replied Bergenheim, "I suppose that without being either, I should kill my wife, the fellow and then myself, the whole lot without even crying, 'look out!' Here! Brichou; pay attention; Tambeau is separated from the rest."

As he said these words the baron leaped over a broad ditch, which divided the road from the clearing which the hunters had already entered.

"What do you say to that?" murmured the artist in a rather dramatic tone in his friend's ear.

Instead of replying, the lover made a gesture which signified according to all appearance: "I do not care."

The clearing they must cross in order to reach the woods formed a large square field upon an inclined plane which sloped to the river side. Just as Marillac in his turn was jumping the ditch, his friend saw at the extremity of the clearing, Madame de Bergenheim slowly walking in the avenue of sycamores. A moment later, she had disappeared behind a mass of trees without the other men noticing her.

"Take care that you do not slip," said the artist, "the ground is wet."

This warning brought misfortune to Gerfaut who in jumping caught his foot in the root of a tree and fell.

"Are you hurt?" asked Bergenheim.

Octave arose and tried to walk, but was obliged to lean upon his gun.

"I think I have twisted my foot," said he, and he carried his hand to it as if he felt a sharp pain there.

"The devil! it may be a sprain," observed the baron coming toward them; "sit down. Do you think you will be able to walk?"

"Yes, but I fear hunting would be too much for me; I will return to the house."

"Do you wish us to make a litter and carry you?"

"You are laughing at me; it's not so bad as that. I will walk back slowly and will take a foot bath in my room."

"Lean upon me then, and I will help you," said the artist offering his arm.

Thanks; I do not need you," replied Octave; "go to the devil!" continued he in an expressive aside.

"*Capisco*," replied Marillac in the same tone, giving his arm an expressive pressure. "Excuse me," said he aloud, "I am not willing that you should go alone. I will be your Antigone—

"'Antigone me reste, Antigone est ma fille.'

"Bergenheim, I will take charge of him. Go on with your hunting, the gentlemen are waiting for you. We will meet again at supper; around the table; legs are articles of luxury and sprains a delusion, provided that the throat and stomach are properly treated."

The baron looked first at his guests, then at the group that had just reached the top of the clearing. For an instant christian charity struggled against love of hunting, then the latter triumphed. As he saw that Octave, although limping slightly, was already in a condition to walk, especially with the aid of his friend's arm, he said:

"Do not forget to put your foot in water and send for Rousselet; he understand all about sprains."

This advice having eased his conscience, he joined his companions, while the two friends slowly took the road back to the chateau, Octave resting one hand upon the artist's arm and the other upon his gun.

"The bourgeois's outwitted!" said Marillac with a stifled laugh as soon as he was sure that Bergenheim could not hear him. "Upon my word, these soldiers have a primitive, baptismal candor! It is not so with us artists; they could not bamboozle us in this way. Your sprain is an old story; it is taken from the *Mariage de raison*, first act, second scene."

"You will do me a favor to leave me as soon as we reach the woods," said Gerfaut, as he continued to limp with a grace which would have made Lord Byron envious; "you may go straight ahead, or you may turn to the left, as you choose; the right is forbidden you."

"All right. Hearts are trumps, it seems, and, for the time being, you agree with Sganarelle, who places the heart on the right side."

"Do not return to the chateau, as it is understood that we are together. If you rejoin the hunting party say to Bergenheim that you left me seated at the

foot of a tree and that the pain in my foot had almost entirely gone. You would have done better not to have accompanied me, as I tried to make you understand."

"I had reasons of my own for wishing to get out of Christian's crowd. To-day is Monday and I have an appointment at four o'clock which interests you more than me. Now, will you listen to a little advice?"

"Listen, yes; follow it, not so sure."

"O race of lovers!" exclaimed the artist in a sort of transport, "foolish, absurd, wicked, impious and sacrilegious kind!"

"What of it?"

"What of it? I tell you this will all end with swords for two."

"Bah!"

"Do you know that this rabid Bergenheim, with his round face and good natured smile, killed three or four men while he was in the service on account of a game of billiards or some such trivial matter?"

"Requiescant in pace."

"Take care that he does not cause the *De Profundis* to be sung for you. He was called the best swordsman at Saint-Cyr: he has the devil of a lunge. As to pistol-shooting, I have seen him break nine plaster images at Lepage's one after another."

"Very well, if I have an engagement with him, we will fight it out with arsenic."

"By George, joking is out of place. I tell you that he is sure to discover something, and then your business will soon be settled; he will kill you as if you were one of the hares he is hunting this moment "

"You might find a less humiliating comparison for

me," replied Gerfaut with an indifferent smile; "however you exaggerate. I have always noticed that these bullies with mysterious thrusts of their own and those slaughterers of plaster images were not so very dangerous fellows to meet. This is not disputing Bergenheim's bravery, for I believe it to be solid and genuine."

"I tell you he is a regular lion! After all, you will admit that it is sheer folly to come and attack him in his cage and pull his whiskers through the bars. And that is what you are doing. To be in love with his wife and pay court to her in Paris, when he is a hundred leagues from you, is all very well, but to install yourself in his house within reach of his clutches! that is not love, it is sheer madness. This is nothing to laugh at. I am sure that this will end in some horrible tragedy. You heard him speak of killing his wife and her lover just now as if it were a very slight matter. Very well; I know him; he will do as he says without flinching. These ruddy-faced people are very devils if you meddle with their family affairs! He is capable of murdering you in some corner of his park and of burying you at the foot of some tree and then to force Madame de Bergenheim to eat your heart fricasseed in champagne, as they say Raoul de Courcy did."

"You will admit at least that it would be a very charming repast and there would be nothing bourgeois about it."

"Certainly, I boast of detesting the bourgeois, I am celebrated for that; but I should much prefer to die in a worsted night-cap, flannel underwear and cotton night shirt, than to have Bergenheim assist me, too

brusquely, in this little operation. He is such an out and out Goliath! Just look at him!"

And the artist forced his friend to turn about and pointed to Christian who stood with the other hunters upon the brow of the hill, a few steps from where they had left him. The baron was indeed a worthy representative of the feudal ages when physical strength was the only incontestable superiority. In spite of the distance, they could hear his clear ringing voice although they could not distinguish his words.

"He really has a look of the times of the Round Table," said Gerfaut; "five or six hundred years ago it would not have been very agreeable to have found oneself face to face with him in a tournament, and if to-day, as in those times, feminine hearts were won by feats with double-edged swords, I admit that my chances would not be very good. Fortunately we are emancipated from animal vigor; it is utterly out of fashion."

"Out of fashion if you like, meanwhile he will kill you."

"You do not understand the charms of danger nor the attractions that difficulties give to pleasure. I have studied Christian thoroughly, since I have been here, and I know him as well as if I had passed my life with him. I am also sure that, at the very first revelation, he will kill me if he can, and I take a strange interest in knowing that I risk my life thus. Here we are in the woods," said Gerfaut as he dropped the artist's arm and ceased limping; "they can no longer see us; the farce is played out. You know what I told you to say if you join them; you left me at the foot of a tree. You are forbidden to approach

the sycamores under penalty of receiving the shot from my gun in your mustache."

At these words he threw the gun which had served him as crutch over his shoulder and darted off in the direction of the river.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At the extremity of the sycamore walk, the shore formed a bluff like the one upon which the chateau was built but much more abrupt and partly wooded. In order to avoid this stretch which was not passable for carriages, the road leading into the principal part of the valley turned to the right and reached by an easier ascent a more level plateau. There was only one narrow path by the river which was shaded by branches of beeches and willows which hung over this bank into the river. After walking a short distance through this shady path, one found himself before a huge triangular rock covered with moss that nature had rolled from the top of the mountain as if to close up the passage.

This obstacle was not insurmountable; but in order to cross it, one must have a sure foot and steady head, for the least false step would precipitate the unlucky one into the river which was rapid as well as deep. From the rock, one could reach the top of the cliff by means of natural stone steps and then descending on the other side, he could resume the path by the river which had been momentarily interrupted. In this case, one would reach, in about sixty steps, a place where the river grew broader, and the banks projected here and there forming little islands of sand covered with bushes. Here was a ford well

known to shepherds and to all persons who wished to avoid going as far as the castle bridge.

Near the mossy rock of which we have spoken as being close to the sycamore wall, at the foot of a wall against which it leaned forming a rather deep excavation, the current had found a vein of soft brittle stone which by its incessant force it had ended by wearing away. It was a natural grotto formed by water but which earth in its turn had undertaken to embellish. An enormous willow had taken root in a few inches of soil in a fissure in the rock, and its drooping branches fell into the stream which drifted them along without being able to detach them.

Madame de Bergenheim was seated at the front of this grotto upon a seat formed by the base of the rock. She was tracing in the sand, with a stick which she had picked up on the way, strange figures which she carefully erased with her foot. Doubtless these hieroglyphics had some meaning to her, and perhaps she feared lest the slightest vestiges were carelessly forgotten, as they might betray the secret they concealed. Clemence was plunged into one of those ecstatic reveries which abolish time and distance. The fibers of her heart, whose exquisite vibrating had been so suddenly paralyzed by Christian's arrival, had resumed their passionate thrills. She lived over again in her mind the *tete-a-tete* in the drawing-room; she could hear the entrancing waltz again; she felt her lover's breath in her hair; her hand trembled again under the pressure of his kiss. When she awoke from this dream it was a reality; for Octave was seated by her side without her having seen him arrive and he had taken up the scene at the piano just where it had been interrupted.

She was not afraid. Her mind had reached that state of exaltation which renders the transition from dreaming to reality imperceptible. It seemed to her that Octave had always been there, that it was his place and for a moment she no longer thought, but remained motionless in the arms which embraced her. But soon her reason came back to her. She arose trembling, and drew away a few steps, standing before her lover with lowered head, and face suffused with blushes.

"Why are you afraid of me? do you not think me worthy of your love," asked he in an altered voice, and, without trying to retain or approach her, he fell upon his knees with a movement tinged with a sweet, sad grace.

He had analyzed Madam de Bergenheim's character well enough to perceive the least variation in her capricious nature. By the young woman's frightened attitude, her burning cheeks and the flashes which he saw from her eyes through her long drooping lashes he saw that a reaction had taken place and he feared the next outburst; for he knew that women, when overcome with remorse, always smite their lover by way of expiation for themselves.

"If I let this recovered virtue have the mastery, I am a lost man for a fortnight at least," thought he.

He quickly abandoned the dangerous ground upon which he had taken position and passed by an adroit transition, from the most passionate frenzy into the most submissive of bearings. When Clemence raised her large eyes in which there was a threatening gleam, she saw instead of an audacious man to be punished, an imploring slave.





There was something so flattering in this attitude of humility that she was completely disarmed. She approached Octave and took him by the hand to raise him up, seated herself again and allowed him to resume his position beside her. She softly pressed his hand, which she had not let go of and looking her lover in the eyes said in that deep, penetrating voice that women sometimes have:

"My friend!"

"Friend!" thought he; "yes, certainly. I will raise no dispute as to the word, provided the fact is recognized; what matters the color of the flag? only fools trouble themselves about that. 'Friend,' this is not the throne I aspire to, but it is the road that leads to it. So then, let it be 'friend,' while waiting for better. This word is very pleasant to hear when spoken in these siren's accents, and when at the same time the eyes say: 'lover!'"

"Will you always love me thus?" asked Octave, whose face beamed with virtuous pledges.

"Always!" sighed Clemence without lowering her eyes under the burning glance which met hers.

"You will be the soul of my soul; the angel of my heaven?"

"Your sister," said she with a sweet smile as she caressed her lover's cheek with her hand.

He felt the blood mount to his face at this caress and turned his eyes away with a dreamy air.

"I probably am one of the greatest fools that has ever existed since the days of Joseph and Hippolytus," thought he.

He remained silent and apparently indifferent for several moments.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Madame de Bergenheim surprised by Octave's silence and rather listless air.

He gave a start of surprise at this question.

"May I die if I tell her," thought he; "she must think me ridiculous enough as it is."

"Tell me, I wish you to speak out," she continued in that despotic tone which a woman sure of her empire assumes.

Instead of replying as she demanded him to, he gave her a long questioning glance, and it would have been impossible at that moment for her to have kept a single secret from her lover. Madame de Bergenheim felt the magnetic influence of his penetrating glance so deeply that it seemed to her that these sharp eyes were fathoming her very heart. She felt intensely disturbed to be gazed at in that way, and in order to free herself from this mute questioning, she leaned her head upon Octave's shoulder as she said softly:

"Do not look at me like this or I shall not love your eyes any more."

Her straw hat, whose ribbons were not tied, slipped and fell, dragging with it the comb which confined her beautiful hair, and it fell in disorder over her shoulders. Gerfaut passed his hand behind the charming head which rested upon his breast in order to carry this silky perfumed fleece to his lips. At the same time, he gently pressed the supple form which as it bent toward him seemed to ask for this caress.

Clemence made a sudden effort and arose fastening her hair at the back of her head with an almost shamed haste.

"Will you refuse me one lock of your hair as a souvenir of this hour?" said Octave, stopping her gently as she was about to replace her comb.

"Do you need any souvenir?" replied she, giving him a glance which was neither a reproach nor a refusal.

"The souvenir is in my heart, the hair will never leave my bosom! We live in an unworthy age. I cannot boast of wearing your colors in everybody's eyes and yet I would like to wear a sign of my bondage."

She let her hair fall down her back again, but seemed embarrassed as to how to execute his wish.

"I cannot cut my hair with my teeth," said she with a smile which betrayed a double row of pearls.

Octave took a stiletto from his pocket.

"Why do you always carry this stiletto?" asked the young woman, in a changed voice; "it frightens me to see you armed thus."

"Fear nothing," said Gerfaut who did not reply to her question, "I will respect the hair which serves you as a crown. I know where I must cut it and, if my ambition is great, my hand shall be discreet."

Madame de Bergenheim had no confidence in his moderation, and fearing to leave her beautiful hair to her lover's mercy she took the stiletto and cut off a little lock which she drew through her fingers and then offered him with a loving gesture which doubled the value of the gift. At this moment, hunting horns resounded in the distance.

"I must leave you now!" exclaimed Clemence, "I must. My dear love, let me go now; say good-bye to me."

She leaned toward him and presented her forehead to receive this adieu. It was her lips which met Octave's but this kiss was rapid and fleeting as a flash of light. Withdrawing from the arms which would yet retain her, she darted out of the grotto, and in a moment had disappeared in one of the shady paths.

For some time, plunged in deep reflection, Gerfaut stood on the same spot; but at last arousing himself from this dreamy languor, he climbed the rock so as to reach the top of the cliff. After taking a few steps, he stopped with a frightened look as if he had espied some venomous reptile in his path. He could see, through the bushes which bordered the crest of the plateau at the top of the ladder cut in the rock, Bergenheim motionless and in the attitude of a man who is trying to conceal himself in order that he may watch somebody. The baron's eyes not being turned in Gerfaut's direction, he could not tell whether he was the object of this espionage or if the lay of the land allowed him to see Madame de Bergenheim who must be under the sycamores by this time. Uncertain as to what he should do, he remained motionless, half crouched down upon the rock behind the ledge of which, thanks to his position, he could hide from the baron.

CHAPTER XIX

A few moments before the castle clock struck four, a man leaped across the ditch which served as enclosure to the park. Lambèrnier, for it was he who showed himself so prompt at keeping his promise, directed his steps through the thickets toward the corner of the Corne woods which he had designated to Marillac; but, after having walked for some time he was forced to slacken his steps. The hunting party were coming in his direction and Lambèrnier knew that to continue in the path he had first chosen would take him directly into the midst of the hunters; and in spite of his insolence, he feared the baron too much to wish to expose himself to the danger of another chastisement. He therefore retraced his steps and took a roundabout way through the thickets whose paths were all familiar to him; he descended to the banks of the river ready to ascend to the place appointed for the rendezvous as soon as the hunting party had passed.

He had hardly reached the plateau covered with trees which extended above the rocks when, as he entered a clearing which had been recently made, he saw two men coming toward him who were walking very fast and whom to meet in this place caused him a very disagreeable sensation. The first man was Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's coachman, as large a fellow as ever brushed the seats of landau or brougham with his ro-

tundity. He was advancing with hands in the pockets of his green jacket and his broad shoulders thrown back as if he had taken it upon himself to replace Atlas. His cap, placed military fashion upon his head, his scowling brows and his bombastic air announced that he was upon the point of accomplishing some important deed which greatly interested him. Leonard Rousselet, walking by his side, moved his spider legs with equal activity, carefully holding up the skirts of his long coat as if it were a petticoat.

Lambertier, at sight of them, turned to enter the woods again, but he was stopped in his retreat by a threatening shout.

"Stop, you vagabond!" exclaimed the coachman; "halt! If you take a trot, I take a galop."

"What do you want? I have no business with you," replied the workman in a surly tone.

"But I have business with you," replied the big domestic placing himself in front of him and balancing himself first on his toes then his heels, with a motion like the wooden rocking horses children play with. "Come here, Rousselet; are you wheezy or foundered?"

"I have not as good legs as your horses," replied the old man who reached them at last perfectly breathless and took off his hat to wipe his forehead.

"What does this mean, jumping out upon one from a corner in the woods like two assassins?" asked Lambertier foreseeing that this beginning might lead to some scene in which he was threatened to play a not very agreeable role.

"It means," said the coachman; "first, that Rousselet has nothing to do with it; I do not need any-

body's help to punish an insignificant fellow like you; second, that you are going to receive your quietus in a trice."

At these words, he pushed his cap down over his ears and rolled up his sleeves in order to give freer action to his large broad hands.

The three men were standing upon a plot of ground where charcoal had been burned the year before. The ground was black and slippery, but being rather level, was a very favorable place for a duel with fists or any other weapons. When Lambernier saw the lackey's warlike preparations, he placed his cap and coat upon an old stump and stationed himself in front of his adversary. But, before the hostilities had commenced, Rousselet advanced, stretching his long arms out between them and said in a voice whose solemnity seemed to be increased by the gravity of the occasion.

"I do not suppose that you wish to simultaneously kill each other," said he, "only uneducated people conduct themselves in this vulgar manner; you ought to have a friendly explanation and see if the matter is not susceptible of arrangement. That was the way such things were done when I was in the 25th demi-brigade."

"The explanation is," said the coachman in his gruff voice, "that here is a low fellow who takes every opportunity to undervalue me and my horses and I have sworn to give him a good drubbing the first time I could lay my hands upon him. So, Pere Rousselet, step aside. He will see if I am a pickle; he will find out that the pickle is peppery!"

"If you made use of such a vulgar expression as that," observed Rousselet turning to Lambernier, "you

were at fault and should beg his pardon as is the custom among educated people."

"It is false!" exclaimed Lambenier; "and besides, everybody calls the Corandeuils that, on account of the color of their livery."

"Did you not say Sunday at the "Femme-Sans-Tete," and in the presence of Thiedot, that all the servants of the chateau were idlers and good-for-nothings, and that if you met one of them who tried to annoy you, you would level him with your plane?"

"If you used the word level it was very uncivil," observed Rousselet.

"Thiedot had better keep in his own house," growled the carpenter clenching his fists.

"It looks well for a tramp like you to insult gentlemen like us," continued the lackey in an imposing tone. "And did you not say that when I took Mademoiselle to mass I looked like a green toad upon the box, thus trying to dishonor my physique and my clothes! Did you not say that?"

"Only a joke about the color of your livery. They call the others measles and lobsters."

"Lobsters are lobsters," replied the coachman in an imperative tone; "if that vexes them they can take care of themselves. But I will not allow any one to attack my honor or that of my beasts by calling them screws—and that is what you did, you vagabond! And did you not say that I sent bags of oats to Remiremont to be sold and that, for a month, my team had steadily been getting thin? Did you ever hear anything so scandalous, Pere Rousselet? to dare to say that I endanger the lives of my horses? Did you not say that, you rascal? And did you not say that

Mademoiselle Marianne and I had little private feasts in her room and that was why I could not eat more at the table? Here is Rousselet who has been a doctor and knows that I am on a diet on account of my weak stomach." At these words, the servant, carried away by his anger, gave his stomach a blow with his fists.

"Lambenier," said Rousselet turning up his lips with a look of contempt, "I must admit that, for a man well brought up, you have made most disgusting remarks."

"To say that I eat the horses' oats!" roared the coachman.

"I ought to have said that you drank them," replied Lambenier with his usual sneer.

"Rousselet, out of the way," exclaimed the burly lackey at this new insult; the old peasant not moving as quickly as he desired, he seized him by the arm and sent him whirling ten steps away.

At this moment, a new person completed the scene, joining in it, if not as actor at least as interested spectator. If the two champions had suspected his presence they would have probably postponed their fight until a more opportune moment, for this spectator was no other than the baron himself. As he saw from a distance the trio gesticulating in a very animated manner, he judged that a disorderly scene was in preparation, and as he had wished for a long time to put an end to the quarrelsome ways of the chateau servants, he was not sorry to catch them in the very act so as to make an example of them. At first, he stooped and concealed himself in the thickets ready to appear for the denouement.

As Lambenier saw the giant's fist coming down up-

on him, he darted to one side and the blow only struck the air making the coachman stumble from the force of his impetuosity. Lambernier profited by this position to gather together all his strength and threw himself upon his adversary, whom he seized by the flank and gave such a severe blow as to bring him down upon his knees. He then gave him a dozen more blows upon the head and succeeded in overthrowing him completely.

If the coachman had not had a cranium as hard as iron, he could not probably have received such a storm of fisticuffs without giving up the ghost. Fortunately for him, he had one of those excellent Breton heads that break the sticks which beat them. With the exception of a certain giddiness, he came out of the scramble safe and sound. Far from losing his presence of mind by the disadvantageous position in which he found himself, he supported himself upon the ground with his left hand and passing his other arm behind him he wound it around the workman's legs, who thus found himself reaped down, so to speak, and a moment later was lying on his back in front of his adversary. The later holding him fast with his strong hands placed a knee, as large as a plate, upon his chest and then pulled off the cap that his enemy had pushed down over his eyes and proceeded to administer full justice to him.

"Ah! you thought you'd attack me treacherously, did you?" said he with a derisive chuckle as if to slacken the speed of his horses. "You know short reckonings make good friends. Oh! what a fine thrashing you are going to receive, my friend! Take care; if you try to bite my hand, I'll choke you with my two

fingers, do you hear! Now, then, take this for the green toad; this, for my horses' sake; this, for Mademoiselle Marianne!"

He followed each "this" with a heavy blow from his fist. At the third blow, the blood poured out of the mouth of the carpenter, who writhed under the pressure of his adversary's knee like a buffalo stifled by a boa constrictor; he succeeded at last in freeing one hand which he thrust into his trousers' pocket.

"Ah! you rascal! I am killed!" howled the coachman giving a bound backwards. Lambernier, profiting by his freedom, jumped upon his feet and without troubling himself as to his adversary who had fallen on his knees and was pressing his hand to his left thigh, he picked up his cap and vest and started off through the clearing. Rousselet, who until then had prudently kept aside, tried to stop the workman, at a cry from his companion, but the scoundrel randished his iron compass before his eyes with such an ugly look that the peasant promptly left the way open for him.

At this tragic and unexpected denouncement, Bergenheim, who was getting ready to make his appearance from behind the trees and to interpose his authority, started in full pursuit of the would-be-murderer. From the direction he took he judged that he would try to reach the river by passing over the rock. He walked in this direction, with his gun over his shoulder, until he reached the foot of the steps which descended into the grotto. Christian crouched down behind some bushes to wait for Lambernier who must pass this way and, it was at this moment that Gerfaut who was forty feet below him, saw him without suspecting the reason for this attitude.

Bergenheim soon found out that he had calculated correctly when he heard a sound like that made by a wild boar when he rushes through the thickets and breaks the small branches in his path as if they were no more than blades of grass. Soon Lambernier appeared with a haggard, wild look and a face bleeding from the blows he had received. He stopped for a moment to catch his breath and to wipe off his compass with a handful of grass; he then staunched the blood streaming from his nose and mouth and after putting on his coat started rapidly off in the direction of the river.

"Halt!" exclaimed the baron suddenly rising up before him and baring his passage.

The workman jumped back in terror; then he drew out his compass a second time and made a movement as if to throw himself upon this new adversary, out of sheer desperation. Christian, at this threatening pantomime raised his gun to his cheek with as much coolness and precision as he would have shown at firing into a body of soldiers.

"Down with your weapon!" exclaimed he in his commanding voice, "or I will shoot you down like a rabbit."

The carpenter uttered a hoarse cry as he saw the muzzle of the gun within an inch of his head, ready to blow his brains out. Feeling assured that there was no escape for him, he closed his compass and threw it with an angry gesture at the baron's feet.

"Now," said the latter, "you will walk straight ahead of me as far as the chateau and if you turn one step to the right or left, I will send the contents of my gun into you. So right about march!"

As he said these words, he stooped without losing sight of the workman, and picked up the compass which he put in his pocket.

"Monsieur le baron, it was the coachman who attacked me first, I had to defend myself," stammered Lambernier.

"All right, we will see about that later. March on!"

"You will deliver me up to the police—I am a ruined man!"

"That will make one rascal the less," exclaimed Christian repulsing with disgust the workman who had thrown himself on his knees before him.

"I have three children, monsieur; three children," repeated he in a supplicating tone.

"Will you march!" replied Bergenheim imperiously as he made a gesture with his gun as if to shoot him.

Lambernier arose suddenly and the expression of terror upon his countenance gave place to one of resolution mixed with hatred and scorn.

"Very well," exclaimed he, "let us go on! but remember what I tell you; if you have me arrested, you will be the first too repent of it, baron though you are. If I appear before a judge, I will tell something that you would pay a good price for."

Bergenheim looked fixedly at Lambernier.

"What do you mean by such insolence?" said he.

"I will tell you what I mean, if you will promise to let me go; if you give me into the hands of the police, I repeat it, you will repent not having listened to me to-day."

"This is some idle yarn in order to gain time; no matter, speak, I will listen."

The workman darted a defiant glance at Christian.

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gave the workman a withering glance
for him to continue.

"Give me your word of honor to let me go afterwards."

"If I do not do so, are you not at liberty to repeat your story" replied the baron who, in spite of his curiosity, would not give his word to a scoundrel whose only aim probably was to escape justice.

This observation impressed Lambernier who, after a moment's reflection, assumed a strange attitude of cool assurance considering the position in which he found himself. Not a sound was to be heard; even the barking of the dogs in the distance had ceased. The deepest silence surrounded them; even Gerfaut in the place where he was concealed, could no longer see them, now that Bergenheim had left the edge of the cliff; from time to time their voices reached him, but he could not distinguish the meaning of their words.

Leaning with one hand upon his gun, Christian waited for the carpenter to commence his story, gazing at him with his clear piercing eyes. Lambernier bore this glance without flinching, returning it in his insolent way.

"You know, sir, that when the alterations were made in madame's apartment, I had charge of the carving for her chamber. When I took away the old wood-work, I saw that the wall between the windows was constructed out of square, and I asked madame if she wished that the panel should be fastened like the other or if she preferred it to open so that it would make a closet. She said to have it open by means of a secret spring. So I made the panel with concealed hinges and a little button hidden in the lower part of the wood work; it only needs to be

pressed, after turning it to the right, and the wood work will open like a door."

Christian had now become extremely attentive.

"Monsieur will remember that he was in Nancy at the time and that madame's chamber was completed during his absence. As I was the only one who worked in this room, the other workmen not being capable of carving the wood as madame wished, I was the only person who knew that the panel was not nailed down the length of the wall."

"Well?" asked the baron impatiently.

"Well," replied Lambernier in a careless tone, "if, on account of the blow which I gave the coachman, it is necessary for me to appear in court, I shall be obliged to tell, in order to revenge myself, what I saw in this closet not more than a month ago."

"Finish your story," exclaimed Bergenheim as he clenched the handle of his gun.

"Mademoiselle Justine took me into this room in order to hang some curtains; as I needed some nails, she went out to get them. While I was examining the wood-work, which I had not seen since it had been put in place, I saw that the oak had warped in one place because it was not dry enough when it was used. I wished to see if the same thing had happened between the windows and if the panel could open. I pressed the spring and when the door opened I saw a small package of letters upon the little shelf; it seemed very singular to me that madame should choose this place to keep her letters and the thought came to me that she wished to conceal them from monsieur."

Bergenheim gave the workman a withering glance and made a sign for him to continue.

"They were already talking about discharging me from the chateau's employ; I do not know how it happened but the thought entered my head that perhaps one of these letters would be of use to me, and I took the first one in the package; I only had time to close the panel when Mademoiselle Justine returned."

"Very well! what is there in common between these letters and the criminal court that awaits you?" asked Christian in an altered voice, although he tried to appear indifferent.

"Oh! nothing at all," replied the miller with an air of indifference; "but I thought that you would not like people to know that madame had a lover."

Bergenheim shivered as if he were taken with a chill and his gun dropped from his hand to the ground.

As quick as thought Lambernier stooped over to seize the gun, but he did not have time to carry out his intention, for he was seized by the throat and half choked by an iron hand.

"That letter! that letter!" said Christian to him in a low, trembling voice and he put his face down close to the carpenter's, as if he feared that a breath of wind might carry away his words and repeat them.

"Let me alone first, I cannot breathe—" stammered the workman whose face was becoming purple and his eyes starting out of his head as if his adversary's fingers had been a rope.

The latter granted the prayer by loosening his hold of the carpenter's neck and seizing him by his vest in such a way as to take away all chance of escape while leaving him free to speak.

"This letter!" he repeated again.

Frightened by the shaking he had just received and not in a condition to reflect with his usual prudence, Lambernier mechanically obeyed this order; he hunted in his pockets for some time and at last took a carefully folded paper from his vest pocket saying with a stunned air:

"Here it is. It is worth ten louis."

Christian seized the paper and opened it with his teeth for he could not use his hands without releasing his prisoner. It was, like all notes of this kind, without address, seal or signature. It did not differ from most of its kind save in the natural beauty of its style and its simple eloquence. Ardent protestations, sweet and loving complaints, those precious words that one only bestows upon the woman he loves and betray a love which has yet much to desire but as much to hope. The hand-writing was entirely unknown to Bergenheim, but Clemence's name, which was repeated several times, did not permit him to doubt for a moment that this note was written to his wife. When he had finished reading, he put it in his pocket with apparent serenity and then looked at Lambernier, who, during this time, had remained motionless under the hand that detained him.

"You are mistaken, Lambernier," said he to him; "it is one of my letters before my marriage." And he tried to force himself to smile; but the muscles of his lips refused to act this falsehood and drops of cold perspiration stood upon his forehead and at the roots of his hair.

The carpenter had watched the change in the baron's countenance as he read the letter. He was persuaded that he could turn the capital importance of

his revelations into profit for himself; he believed that the time had come when he might gain advantage by showing that he understood perfectly well the value of the secret he had just imparted. So he replied with a glance of intelligence:

"Monsieur's hand writing must have changed greatly then; I have some of his orders which do not resemble this any more than a glass of water does a glass of wine."

Christian tried to find a response but could not find one; his eye-brows contracted in a manner that betokened a coming storm, but Lambernier was not disturbed by this symptom; he continued in a more and more assured voice:

"When I said that this letter was worth ten louis, I meant it was worth that much to a mere stranger, and I am very sure I should not have to go very far to find one; but Monsieur le baron is too sensible not to know the value of this secret. I do not wish to set a price upon it, but since I am obliged to go away on account of this coachman, and have no money—"

He did not have time to finish; Bergenheim seized him in the middle of the body and made him describe a horizontal half circle without touching the ground, then threw him upon his knees on the edge of the path which descended almost perpendicularly alongside the rocks. Lambernier suddenly saw his haggard face reflected in the river fifty feet below. At this sight, and feeling a powerful knee between his shoulders which bent him over the abyss as if to make him appreciate its dangers, the workman uttered a terrified cry; his hands wildly clutched at the tufts of grass and roots of plants which grew here and there on the





sides of the rocks, and he struggled with all his might to throw himself back upon the ground. But it was in vain for him to struggle against the superior strength of his adversary and his attempts only aggravated his position. After two or three powerless attempts he found himself lying upon his stomach with half of his body hanging over the precipice and having nothing to prevent him from falling over but Bergenheim's hand which held him by the collar and at the same time hindered him from rising.

"Have you ever said one word about this?" asked the baron as he took hold of the trunk of a tree to steady himself upon this dangerous ground that he had chosen as the field of discussion.

"To nobody—ah!—how my head swims!" replied the carpenter closing his eyes in terror, for the blood rushing to his brain made him dizzy and it seemed to him that the river was slowly reaching him.

"You see that if I make one gesture, you are a dead ~~man~~," replied the baron leaning upon him harder yet.

"Give me up to the police, I will say nothing about the letters; as sure as there is a God, I will say nothing. But do not let me fall—hold me tight—do not let go of me—I am slipping,—oh! holy mother of God!"

Christian taking hold of the tree near him, leaned over and raised Lambernier up, for he really was incapable of doing so himself; fright and the sight of the water had given him vertigo. When he was upon his legs again, he reeled like a drunken man and his feet nearly gave way beneath him. The baron looked at him a moment in silence, but at last he said:

"Go away, leave the country at once; you have time to fly before there will be any pursuit. But remember that if I ever hear one word of what has passed between us from your lips, I shall know how to find you and you will die by my hand."

"I swear by the very Holy Virgin and by all the saints," stammered Lambornier who had suddenly run out a very fervent catholic.

Christian pointed with his finger to the stone steps beneath them.

"There is your road; pass over the rock, through the woods, and reach Alsace. If you conduct yourself well, I will assure your living. But remember; one single indiscreet word, and you are a dead man."

At these words he pushed him into the path with one of those quick movements which very powerful men cannot always calculate the effect of. Lambornier, whose strength was almost exhausted by the struggles he had undergone, had not vigor enough left to stand and he lost his balance at this violent as well as unexpected push. He stumbled over the first step, reeled as he tried to regain his footing, and fell head first down the almost vertical declivity. A ledge of the cliff, against which he first struck, threw him upon the loose rocks. He slowly glided downwards uttering lamentable cries; he clutched, for a moment, a little bush which had grown in a crevice of the rocks but he did not have strength enough to hold on to it. His arm having been broken in three places by his fall. He let go of it suddenly, and dropped farther and farther down, uttering a last terrible shriek of despair. He rolled over twice again—and then fell into the torrent below that swallowed him up like a mass already deprived of life.

CHAPTER XX

Guests were seated that evening around the oval table in the dining room of the castle of Bergenheim. According to custom, the ladies were not present at this repast. This was a custom which had been adopted by the baroness for the suppers which were given by her husband at the close of his hunting parties; she dispensed with appearing at table on those days; perhaps she was too fastidious to preside at these lengthy seances of which the ruses of the hare, the death of the stag and the feats of the hounds formed the principal topics of conversation. It is probable that this conduct was duly appreciated by those who participated in those rather boisterous repasts, and that they felt a certain gratitude in spite of the regrets they manifested on account of "madame's absence."

Among the guests was Marillac, whose sparkling eye and cheeks, even more rosy than usual, made him conspicuous. Seated between a fat notary and another boon companion who were about as drunk as bishops, he emptied glass after glass, the red wine after the white, the white after the red, with noisy laughter, bon-mots and jests of all kinds by way of accompaniment. His head became every moment more and more excited by the libations destined to refresh his throat, and his neighbors, without his perceiving the conspiracy, thought it would be good fun to put a Parisian dandy under the table. However, he was

not the only one who was gliding over the slippery precipice that leads to the attractive abyss of drunkenness. A majority of the guests shared his imprudent abandon and progressive exaltation. There resigned a bacchic emulation which threatened to end in a gayety bordering upon debauch.

In the midst of these highly colored cheeks, under which the wine seemed to circulate with the blood, of these eyes shining with a dull, fictitious light, of all this disorderly pantomime so contrary to the quiet habit of the gesticulators, two faces contrasted strangely with the careless mirth of the others. The baron fulfilled his duties as master of the house with a sort of nervous excitement which might pass for genuine merriment in the eyes of those of his guests who were in no condition to study his countenance; but a quiet observer would soon have discerned that these violent efforts at good humor and bantering concealed some terrible suffering. From time to time, in the midst of a sentence or a laugh, he would suddenly stop, the muscles of his face would twitch as if the spring which set them in motion had broken; his expression became somber and savage; he sank back in his chair motionless, a stranger to all that surrounded him, and giving himself up to some mysterious thought against which resistance seemed powerless. Suddenly he appeared to wake from some perplexing dream, and by another powerful effort aroused himself and joined in the conversation with sharp, cutting speeches; he encouraged the noisy humor of his guests, inciting them to drunkenness by setting the example himself; then the same mysterious thought would cross his face anew, and he would fall

back into the tortures of a reverie which must have been horrible judging by the expression of his face.

Among his guests, one only, who was seated almost opposite Bergenheim, seemed to be in the secret of his thoughts and to study the symptoms with deep attention. Gerfaut, for it was he, showed an interest in this examination which reacted on his own countenance, for he was paler than ever.

"When I saw that the hare was reaching the upper road," said one of the guests, a handsome old man about sixty years of age, with grey hair and rosy cheeks "I ran toward the new clearing to wait for its return. I felt perfectly sure, notary, that he would pass through your hands safe and sound."

"Now then, notary," said Marillac from the other end of the table, "defend yourself; one, two, three, ready!"

"Monsieur de Camier," replied the hunter whose skill had been questioned, "I do not pretend to have your skill. I never have shot as large game as you did at your last hunt."

This reply was an allusion to a little misadventure which had happened to the first speaker, who, on account of near sightedness, had shot a cow taking it for a buck. The laugh which had been at the notary's expense first, now turned against his adversary.

"How many pairs of boots did you get out of your game?" asked one.

"Gentlemen, let us return to our conversation," said a young man whose precise face aspired to an austere and imposing air. "Up to this time, we can form only very vague conjectures as to the road that Lambernier took to escape. This, allow me to say, is more im-

portant than the notary's hare or M. de Camier's cow."

At these words, Bergenheim who had taken no part in the conversation straightened up in his chair.

"A glass of Sauterne," said he suddenly to one of his neighbors.

Gerfaut looked at him stealthily for a moment and then lowered his eyes as if he feared his glance might be noticed.

"The public prosecutor scents a culprit and there is no fear he will drop the trail," said the notary.

"The case will doubtless come up at the next session of the Assizes."

M. de Camier put his glass, which was half filled, down upon the table, angrily exclaiming:

"The devil take the jury! I am called to the next session and I will wager my head that I shall be drawn. How agreeable that will be! To leave my home and business in the middle of winter and spend a fortnight with a lot of fellows whom I do not know from Adam! That is one of the agreeable things supplied by constitutional government. The French have to be judged by their peers! What good is it to pay for judges if we, land-owners, are obliged to do their work. The old parliaments against which so much has been said were a thousand times better than all this bedlam let loose of a court of assizes."

Marillac, who during this speech was amusing himself with singing his low "G" while peeling an apple, interrupted his song to the great relief of a hound who lay at his feet, and whose nerves seemed to be singularly affected by the strain.

"Monsieur de Camier," said he, "you are a large

land-owner, an eligible citizen and a Carlist; you fast on Fridays, go to mass in your parish, and occasionally kill cows for bucks; I esteem and respect you; but allow me to say that you have just uttered an old, antediluvian platitude."

"Gentlemen," said the public prosecutor punctuating each word with his first finger, "I have the greatest respect for the old parliaments, those worthy models of our modern magistracy, those incorruptible defenders of national freedom, but my veneration is none the less great for the institutions emanating from our wise constitution, and it prevents me from adopting an exclusive opinion. However, without pretending to proclaim in too absolute a manner the superiority of the old system over the new, I am in a certain sense of M. de Camier's opinion. In my position, I am better able than any other person to study the advantages and disadvantages of a jury, and I am forced to admit that if the advantages are real, the disadvantages are none the less indisputable. One of the great vices of juries consists in the habit that a great number of its members have of calling for material proofs in order to form their opinion. They must almost see the wounds of the victim before agreeing on a verdict. As to Lambernier, I hope that they will not contest the existence of the main evidence: the victim's still bleeding thigh."

"Tra-de-ri-di-ra," exclaimed the artist, striking alternately with his knife a glass and a bottle, as if he were playing a triangle. "I must say that you choose madly gay subjects for conversation. We are truly a joyous crowd; look at Bergenheim opposite us; he looks like Macbeth in the presence of Banquo's ghost;

here is my friend Gerfaut drinking water with a profoundly solemn air. Good gracious, gentlemen, enough of this foolish talk! Let them cut this Lambernier's throat and put an end to the subject! The theater for dramatic music, the church for sacred.

"Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine."

A general protestation rose from the whole table at this verse which was roared out in a lugubrious voice. Noisy shouts, rapping of knives upon tumblers and bottles, and exclamations of all kinds called the orator to order.

"Monsieur Marillac," exclaimed the public prosecutor in a joking tone. "It seems to me that you have wandered from the subject."

The artist looked at him with an astonished air.

"Had I anything in particular to say to you?" asked he; "if so, I will sustain my point. Only do me the kindness to tell me what it was about."

"It was on the subject of this man Lambernier," whispered the notary to him as he poured out a glass of wine. "Courage! you improvise better than Berryer! If you exert yourself the public prosecutor will be beaten in no time."

Marillac thanked his neighbor with a smile and a nod of the head which signified: "trust me." He then emptied his glass with the recklessness that had characterized his drinking for some time, but strangely enough the libation instead of putting the finishing stroke to his drunkenness gave his mind, for the time being, a sort of lucidity.

"The accusation," continued he with the coolness of an old lawyer, "rests upon two grounds; first, the presence without cause of the accused upon the spot

where the crime was committed; second, the nature of the weapon used.—Two simple but peremptory replies will make the scaffold which has been erected upon this double supposition fall to the ground. First, Lambernier had a rendezvous at this place and at the exact hour when this crime with which he is accused took place; this will be proved by a witness and will be established by evidence in a most indisputable manner. His presence will thus be explained without its being interpreted in any way against him; second, the public prosecutor has admitted that the carrying of a weapon which Lambernier may have been in the habit of using in his regular trade could not be used as an argument against him, and for that same reason could not be used as an argument in favor of premeditation; now, this is precisely the case in question. This weapon was neither a sword, bayonet nor stiletto, nothing that the fertile imagination of the public prosecutor could imagine; it was a simple tool used by the accused in his profession, the presence of which in his pocket is as easily understood as that of a snuff box in the pocket of my neighbor, the notary, who takes twenty pinches of snuff a minute. Gentlemen, this weapon was a pair of carpenter's compasses."

"A compass!" exclaimed several voices at once.

"A compass!" exclaimed the baron gazing fixedly at the artist. Then he carried his hand to his pocket and suddenly withdrew it as he felt the workman's compass there, where it had been ever since the scene upon the rocks.

"An iron compass," repeated the artist, "about ten inches long, more or less, the legs of it being closed."

"Will you explain yourself, monsieur?" excitedly exclaimed the public prosecutor, "for it really seems as if you had witnessed the crime. In that case you will be called out as a witness for the defence. Justice is impartial, gentlemen. Justice has not two pairs of scales."

"To the devil with justice, you must have come from Timbuctoo to use such old fashioned metaphors."

"Make your deposition, witness; I require you to make your deposition," said the magistrate whose increasing drunkenness appeared as dignified and solemn as the artist, was noisy.

"I have nothing to state, I saw nothing."

Here the baron drew a long breath, as if these words were a relief.

"But I saw something!" said Gerfaut to himself, as he gazed at the baron's face upon which anxiety was depicted.

"I reason by hypothesis and supposition," continued the artist. "I had a little altercation with Lambernier a few days ago, and, but for my good poignard, he would have put an end to me as he did to this fellow to-day."

He then related his meeting with Lambernier, but the consideration due Mademoiselle Gobillot's honor imposed numberless circumlocutions and concealments which ended by making his story rather unintelligible to his auditors, and in the midst of it his head became so muddled that he was completely put out.

"Basta!" exclaimed he in conclusion as he dropped heavily into his chair. "Not another word for the whole empire. Give me something to drink! Notary,

you are the only man here who has any regard for me. One thing is certain about this matter—I am in ten louis by this rascal's adventure."

These words struck the baron forcibly as they brought to his mind what the carpenter had said to him when he gave him the letter.

"Ten louis!" said he suddenly looking at Marillac as if he wished to look into his very heart.

"Two hundred francs if you like it better. A genuine bargain. But we have talked enough, mio caro; you deceive yourself if you think you are going to make me blab. No, indeed! I am not the one to allow myself to become entangled. I am now as mute and silent as the grave."

Bergenheim insisted no longer but leaning against the back of his chair, he let his head fall upon his breast. He remained for some time buried in thought and vainly trying to connect the obscure words he had just heard with Lambernier's incomplete revelations. With the exception of Gerfaut, who did not lose one of his host's movements, the guests, more or less absorbed by their own sensations, paid no attention to the strange attitude of the master of the house, or, like Monsieur de Camier, attributed it to the influence of wine. The conversation continued its noisy course interrupted every few moments by the startling vagaries of some guest more animatedly excited than the rest, for, at the end of a repast where sobriety has not reigned, each one is disposed to impose upon others the despotism of his own intoxication and the idle talk of his peculiar hallucinations. Marillac bore away the prize among the talking contingent, thanks to the vigor of his lungs and the originality of his words,

which sometimes forced the attention of his adversaries. Finally he remained master of the field, and flashed volleys of his drunken eloquence to the right and left.

"It is a pity," exclaimed he in the midst of his triumph, as he glanced disdainfully up and down the table, "it really is a pity, gentlemen, to listen to your conversation. One could imagine nothing more common place—prosaic or bourgeois. Would it not please you to indulge in a discussion of a little higher order? Let us join hands, and talk of poetry and art. I am thirsting for an artistic conversation, I am thirsting for wit and intelligence."

"You must drink if you are thirsty," said the notary filling his glass to the brim.

The artist emptied it at one draught and continued in a languishing voice as he gazed with a loving look at his fat neighbor.

"I will commence our artistic conversation: 'Knowest thou the land where the orange flower bloom?'"

"It is warmer than ours," replied the notary who was not familiar with 'Mignon's' song; and, commencing to laugh maliciously, he gave a wink at his neighbors as if to say:

"I have settled him now."

Marillac leaned toward him with the meekness of a lamb who presents his head to the butcher and sympathetically pressed his hands.

"O poet," continued he, "do you not feel, as I do at the twilight hour and in the eventide, a vague desire for a sunny, perfumed, southern life? Will you not bid adieu to this sterile country and sail away to a land where the blue sky is reflected in the blue sea?"

Venice! the Rialto, the Bridge of Sighs, Saint Mark! Rome! the Coliseum and Saint Peter—But I know Italy by heart; let us go instead to Constantinople. I am thirsting for sultanas and houris, I am thirsting—"

"Good gracious, why do you not drink if you are thirsty?"

"Gladly. I never say no to that. I scorn love in a night cap, I adore danger. Danger is life to me. I dote on silken ladders as long as Jacob's, on citadels worth scaling; on moonlight evenings, bearded husbands and all that sort of thing—I would love a bed composed of five hundred poignards; you understand me, poet—"

"I beg of you, do not make him drink any more," said Gerfaut to the notary.

"You are right not to wish to drink any more, Octave, I was going to advise you not to. You have already drunk to excess to-day, and I am afraid that it will make you ill; your health is so weak—you are not a strong man like me. Fancy gentlemen, monsieur le vicomte de Gerfaut, a native of Gascony, a roué by profession, a star of the first magnitude in literature, is afflicted by nature with a stomach which has nothing in common with that of an ostrich; he has need to use the greatest care. So we have him drink Seltzer water principally and feed him on the white meat of the chicken. Besides, we keep this precious phenomenon rolled up between two wool blankets and over a kettle of boiling water. He is a great poet; I myself am a very great poet."

"And I also, I hope," said the notary.

"Gentlemen, formerly there were poets who only wrote

in verse; nowadays, they revel in prose. There are some even who are neither prose nor verse writers, who have never confided their secret to anybody, and who selfishly keep their poetry to themselves. It is a very simple thing to be a poet, provided you feel the indescribable intoxication of the soul, and understand the inexpressible inflatus that bubbles over in your large brain, and your noble heart throbs under your left breast—"

"He is as drunk as a fool," said M. de Camier, loud enough for him to hear.

"Old man," said he, "you are the one who is drunk. Besides the word drunk is not civil; if you had said intoxicated I should not have objected."

Loud shouts of laughter burst forth from the party. He threw a threatening glance around him as if he were seeking some one upon whom to vent his anger and placing his hand upon his hip assumed the pose of a bully:

Softly, my good fellows!" said he, "if any of you pretend that I am drunk, I declare to him that he lies and that I call him a misanthrope, a vagabond an academician!" concluded he with a loud burst of laughter; for he thought that the jesters would be crushed by this last heavy weapon.

"By George! your friend is hilariously drunk," said the notary to Gerfaut; "while here is Bergenheim, who has not taken very much wine and yet looks as if he were assisting at a funeral. I thought he was more substantial than this."

Marillac's voice burst out more loudly than ever, and Octave's reply was not heard.

"It is simply astounding. They are all as drunk

as fools and yet they pretend that it is I who am drunk. Very well! I defy you all; who among you want to argue with me. Will you discuss art, literature, politics, medicine, music, philosophy, archaeology, jurisprudence, magnetism—"

"Jurisprudence!" exclaimed the thick voice of the public prosecutor who was aroused from his stupor by this magic word; "let us talk jurisprudence."

"Would you like," said Marillac without stopping at this interruption, "that I should improvise a discourse upon the death penalty or upon temperance? would you like me to tell you a story?"

"A story, yes, a story!" they all exclaimed in unison.

"Speak out then; order what story you like; it will cost you nothing," replied the artist rubbing his hands with a radiant air. "Would you like a tale from the middle ages? a fairy, an eastern, a comical, or a private story? I warn you that the latter style is less old fashioned than the others."

"Let us have it, then, by all means," said all the drunken voice.

"Very well. Now would you like it to be laid in Spain, Arabia or France?"

"France!" exclaimed the prosecutor.

"I am French, you are French, he is French. You shall have a French story."

Marillac leaned his forehead upon his hands, and his elbows upon the table as if to gather his scattered ideas together. After a few moments' reflection, he raised his head and looked first at Gerfaut, then at Bergenheim with a peculiar smile.

"It would be very original," said he in a low voice as if replying to his own thoughts.

"The story!" exclaimed one of the party more impatient than the rest.

"Here it is," replied the artist. "You all know, gentlemen, how difficult it always is to choose a title. In order not to make you wait I have chosen one which is already well known. My story is to be called 'The husband, the wife and the lover.' We are not all single men here and a wise proverb says that one must never speak—"

In spite of his muddled brain, the artist did not finish his quotation. A remnant of common sense made him realize that he was treading upon dangerous ground and was upon the point of committing an unpardonable indiscretion. Fortunately, the baron had paid no attention to his words; but Gerfaut was frightened at his friend's jabbering and threw him a glance of the most threatening advice to be prudent. Marillac vaguely understood his mistake and was half intimidated by this glance; he leaned before the notary and said to him, in a voice which he tried to make confidential, but which could be heard from one end of the table to the other:

"Be calm, Octave, I will tell it in obscure words and in such a way that he will not see anything in it. It is a scene for a drama that I have in my mind."

"You will make some grotesque blunder, if you go on drinking and talking," replied Gerfaut in an anxious voice. "Hold your tongue or else come away from the table with me."

"When I tell you that I will use obscure words," replied the artist; "what do you take me for? I swear to you that I will gloss it over in such a way that nobody will suspect anything."

"The story! the story!" exclaimed several who were amused by the incoherent chattering of the artist.

"Here it is," said the latter sitting upright in his chair and paying no heed to his friend's warnings. "The scene takes place in a little court in Germany—Eh! "said he looking at Gerfaut and maliciously winking his eye,—“do you not think that is glossed over?"

"Not in a German court, you said it was to be a French story," said the public prosecutor disposed to play the critic toward the orator who had reduced him to silence.

"Well it is a French story, but the scene is laid in Germany," replied he coolly.—“Do you desire to teach me my profession? Understand that nothing is more elastic than a German court; the story-teller can introduce there whoever he likes; I may bring in the Shah of Persia and the emperor of China if I care to. However, if you prefer the court of Italy, it is the same thing to me."

This conciliating proposal, remained without response. Marillac continued raising his eyes in such a way that nothing but the whites could be seen and as if he were searching for his words in the ceiling.

"The Princess Borinska was slowly walking in the mysterious alley on the borders of the foaming torrent"—

"Borinska! she is a Pole then?" interrupted M. de Camier.

"Oh! go to the devil, old man, do not interrupt me," exclaimed the artist impatiently.

"That is right. Silence now."

"You have the floor," said several voices at once.

"—She was pale, and she heaved convulsive sighs

and wrung her soft warm hands and a white pearl rolled from her dark lashes and—"

"Why do you commence all your phrases with 'and?'" asked the public prosecutor with the captiousness of an inexorable critic.

"Because it is biblical and unaffected. Now let me alone," replied Marillac with superb disdain. "You are a police-officer; I am an artist; what is there in common between you and me? I will continue:—and he saw this pensive weeping woman pass in the distance and he said to the prince: 'Borinski, a bit of root in which my foot caught has hurt my limb, will you suffer me to return to the palace? And the prince Borinski said to him, shall my men carry you in a palanquin? and the cunning Octave replied—"

"Your story has not even common sense and you are a terrible bore," interrupted Gerfaut brusquely. "Gentlemen, are we going to sit at the table all night?"

He arose, but nobody followed his example. Bergenheim, who, for the last few minutes had lent an attentive ear to the artist's story, gazed alternately at the two friends with an observing eye.

"Let him talk," said the young magistrate with an ironical smile. "I like the palanquin in the court of Germany. This is probably what novelists call local color. O Racine, poor, deserted Racine!"

Marillac was not intimidated this time by Gerfaut's withering glance but, with the obstinacy of drunkenness, continued in a more or less stammering voice:

"I swore that I would gloss it over; you annoy me. I committed an error, gentlemen, in calling the lover in this story, Octave—It is as clear as day that his

name is Boleslas, Boleslas Matalowski—There is no more connection between him and my friend Octave, than there is between my other friend Bergenheim and the prince Kolinski—Woginski—what the devil has become of my prince's name? A good reward to whoever will tell me his name!"

"It is wrong to take advantage of his condition and make him talk any more," said Gerfaut. "I beg of you, Marillac, hold your tongue and come with me," said he lowering his voice as he leaned toward the headstrong story-teller and took him by the arm trying to make him rise. This attempt only irritated Marillac; he seized hold of the edge of the table and clung to it with all his might, screaming:

"No! a thousand times no! I will finish my story. President, allow me to speak. Ah! ha! you wish to prevent me from speaking because you know that I tell a story better than you do and that I make an impression upon my audience. You have never been able to catch my chic. Jealous! envious! I know you, serpent!"

"I beg of you, if you ever cared for me, listen!" replied Octave who, as he bent over his friend, noticed the baron's attentive look.

"No, I say no!" shouted the artist again, and he added to this word one of the ugliest-sounding oaths in the French language. He arose, and pushing Octave aside, leaned upon the table bursting into a loud laugh.

"Poets all," said he, "be reassured and rejoice. You shall have your story in spite of those envious serpents. But first give me something to drink, for my throat is like a box of matches. No wine," said he

as he saw the notary armed with a bottle. "This devilish wine has made me thirsty instead of refreshing me; beside, I am going to be as sober as a judge."

Gerfaut, with the desperation of a man who sees that he is about to be ruined, seized him again by the arm and tried to fascinate him by his steady gaze. But he obtained no response to this mute and threatening supplication, except a stupid smile and these stammering words:

"Give me something to drink, Boleslas—Marinski—Graboski—I believe that Satan has lighted his heating apparatus within my stomach."

The persons seated near the two friends heard an angry hiss from Gerfaut's lips. He suddenly leaned over and taking, from among several bottles, a little caraffe he filled Marillac's glass to the brim.

"Thanks," said the latter, trying to stand erect upon his legs; "you are an angel. Rest easy, your love affairs will run no risk. I will gloss it all over—To your health, gentlemen!"

He emptied the glass and put it upon the table; he then smiled and waved his hand at his auditors with true royal courtesy; but his mouth remained half open as if his lips were petrefied, his eyes grew large and assumed a haggard expression; the hand he had stretched out fell to his side, a second more, and he reeled and fell from his chair as if he had had a stroke of apoplexy.

Gerfaut, whose eyes had not left him, watched these different symptoms with unutterable anxiety; but in spite of his fright, he drew a sigh of relief when he saw Marillac mute and speechless.

"It is singular," observed the notary as he aided in

removing his neighbor from the table, "that glass of water had more effect upon him than four or five bottles of wine."

"Georges," said Gerfaut to one of the servants in an agitated voice, "open his bed and help me carry him to it; Monsieur de Bergenheim, I suppose there is a druggist near here, if I should need any medicine."

The greater part of the guests arose at this unexpected incident, and some of them hastened to Marillac's side as he remained motionless in his chair. The repeated bathing of his temples with cold water and the holding of salts to his nose were not able to bring him to consciousness.

Instead of going to his aid with the others, Bergenheim profited by the general confusion to lean over the table. He plunged his finger into the artist's glass in which a part of the water remained and then touched his tongue. Only the notary noticed this movement. Thinking this rather strange, he seized the glass in his turn and swallowed the few drops that it contained.

"Heavens!" exclaimed he in a low voice to Bergenheim, "I am not surprised that the bumper asphyxiated him on the spot. Do you know, baron, if this Monsieur de Gerfaut had taken anything but water during the evening, I should say that he was the drunker of the two; or that, if they were not such good friends, he wished to poison him in order to stop his talk. Did you notice that he did not seem pleased to hear this story?"

"Ah! you too!" exclaimed the baron angrily, "everybody will know it."

"To take a caraffe of Kirsch for clear water!" continued the notary without paying any attention to the baron's agitation. "The devil! the safe thing to do is to give him an emetic at once; this poor fellow has enough prussic acid in his stomach to poison a cow."

"Who is talking of prussic acid and poisoning?" exclaimed the public prosecutor running with an unsteady step from one extremity of the table to the other, "who has been poisoned? I am the public prosecutor, I am the only one here who has any power to start an investigation. Have they had an autopsy? where did they find it? buried in the fields or the woods, or floating on the river?"

"You lie, there is no dead body in the river," exclaimed Bergenheim in a thundering voice as he seized the magistrate by the collar in a bewildered way.

The magistrate was incapable of making the least resistance when held by such a vigorous hand and was given two or three shakings. Suddenly the baron stopped and struck his forehead with a gesture common to persons who feel that their reason has given way under a paroxysm of rage.

"I am crazy," said he with much emotion. "Monsieur," said he, "I am very sorry. We really have all taken too much wine. I beg your pardon, messieurs. I will leave you a moment—I need some fresh air."

He hurriedly left the room, almost running against the persons who were carrying Marillac to his room. The public prosecutor, whose ideas had been somewhat mixed before, was now completely muddled by this unheard-of attack upon his dignity, and fell back exhausted in his chair.

"All poor drinkers!" said the notary to Monsieur

de Camier who was left alone with him, for the prosecutor, half suffocated with indignation and intoxication, could no longer be counted as one of them. "Here they are, all drunk, from just a few glasses of wine."

The notary shook his head with a mysterious air.

"These things though, are plain enough to me," said he at last; "first, this Monsieur Marillac has not a very strong head and tells pretty tedious stories when drunk; then his friend has a way of taking kirsch for water which I can understand only in extreme cases, but the baron is the one who astonished me most. Did you notice how he shook our friend who as just fallen on the floor? As to the baron's pretending that he was drunk and thus excusing himself, I do not believe one word of it; he drank nothing but water. There were times this evening when he appeared very strange indeed! There is some devilry underneath all this; Monsieur de Camier, rest assured there is some devilry underneath it all."

"I am the public prosecutor—they cannot remove the body without me," stammered the weak voice of the magistrate who, after trying in vain to recover his equilibrium, lay flat upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

Instead of joining the persons who were carrying Marillac away, Christian went into the garden after leaving the dining room in quest of the fresh air which he gave as an excuse for leaving his guests. In fact, he felt oppressed almost to suffocation by the emotions he had undergone during the last few hours. The dissimulation which prudence made a necessity and honor a duty, had aggravated the suffering by protracted concealment.

For some time, Christian walked rapidly through the paths and trees in the park. Bathing his burning brow in the cool night air, seeking to calm the secret agitation and the boiling blood that were raging within him, and in the midst of which his reason struggled and fought like a ship about to be wrecked. He used all his strength to recover his self-possession, so as to be able to master the perils and troubles which surrounded him with a calm if not indifferent eye; in one word, to regain that control over himself he had lost several times during the supper. His efforts were not in vain. He contemplated his situation without weakness, exaggeration or anger, as if it concerned another. Two facts rose up foremost before him, one accomplished, the other uncertain. On one side, murder, on the other, adultery. No human power could remedy the first or prevent its consequences; he accepted it then, but turn his mind away from it

he must, in the presence of this greater disaster. So far, there only existed presumptions against Clemence, grave ones to be sure, if one added Lambernier's revelations to Marillac's strangely indiscreet remarks. It was his first duty to himself as well as to her, to know the whole truth; if innocent, he would have to beg her forgiveness; if guilty, he had a chastisement to inflict.

"It is an abyss," thought he, "and I may find as much blood as mud at the bottom of it. No matter, I will descend to its very depths."

When he returned to the chateau, his face had resumed its usual calm expression. The most observing person would hardly have noticed any change in his looks. The dining room had been abandoned at last. The victorious and the vanquished had retired to their rooms. First of all he went up to the artist's apartment, so that no singularity in his conduct should attract attention; for, as master of the house, a visit to one of his guests who had fallen dead or nearly so, at his own table, was a positive duty. The attentions lavished upon Marillac by his friend, had removed the danger which might have resulted from his imprudent excesses in drinking, and the sort of poisoning with which he had crowned the whole. He lay upon his bed in the same position he had first been placed and was sleeping that heavy, painful sleep which serves as an expiation for bacchic excesses. Gerfaut was seated a few steps from him, at a table, writing; he seemed prepared to sit up all night, and fulfill, with the devotion of a friend, the duties of a nurse.

Octave arose at sight of the baron, his face having resumed its habitual reserved expression. The two

men greeted each other with equal composure.

"Is he sleeping?" asked Christian.

"Since a few minutes only," replied the latter; "he is all right now, and I hope," Octave added smilingly, "that this will serve as a lesson to you and that hereafter you will put some limits to your princely hospitality. Your table is a regular ambush."

"Do not throw stones at me, I pray," replied the baron with an appearance of equal good humor. "If your friend wants to ask an explanation of anybody it is of you, for you took some kirshen of 1765 for water."

"I really believe that I was the drunker of the two," interrupted Octave with a vivacity which concealed a certain embarrassment; "we must have terribly scandalized Monsieur de Camier who has but a poor opinion of Parisian heads and stomachs."

After looking for a moment at the sleeping artist, Christian approached the table where Gerfaut was seated and threw a glance over the latter's writing.

"You are still at work, I see?" said he, as his eyes rested upon the paper.

"Just now I am following the modest trade of copyist. These are some verses which Mademoiselle de Corandeuil asked me for"—

"Will you do me a favor? I am going to her room now, give me these verses to hand to her. Since the misfortune that befell Constance, she has been terribly angry with me and I shall not be sorry to have some reason for going to her room."

Octave finished the two or three lines which remained to be copied and handed the sheet to Bergenheim. The latter looked at it attentively, then carefully folded it and put it in his pocket.

"I thank you, monsieur," said he, "I will leave you to your friendly duties."

There was something so solemn in the calm accent of these words and the polite bow which accompanied them, that Gerfaut felt chilled, though not alarmed, for he did not understand.

When he reached his room, Bergenheim opened the paper which Gerfaut had just given him and compared it with the letter he had received from Lambernier. The suspicions which a separate examination had aroused were confirmed upon comparing the two letters; no doubt was possible; the letter and the poetry were written by the same hand!

After a few moment's reflection, Christian went to his wife's room.

Clemence was seated in an arm chair, near the fireplace, indulging in a reverie. Although her lover was not there, she was still under the charm of this consuming as well as intellectual passion which responded to the yearnings of her heart, the delicacy of her tastes and the activity of her imagination. At this moment, she was happy to live; there was not a sad thought that these words, 'he loves me!' could not efface.

The noise of the opening door aroused her from her meditation. Madame de Bergenheim turned her head with a look of vexation, but instead of the servant whom she was ready to reprimand, she saw her husband. The expression of impatience imprinted upon her face gave way to one of fright. She arose with a movement she could not repress, as if she had seen a stranger, and stood leaning against the mantel in a constrained attitude. Nothing in Christian's manner

justified, however, the fear the sight of him seemed to cause his wife. He advanced with a tranquil air and a smile that he had forced upon his lips.

With the presence of mind with which all women seem to be gifted, Clemence fell back into her chair and assuming a languid, suffering tone, mixed with an appearance of reproach, she said:

"I am glad to see you for a moment in order to scold you; you have not shown your usual consideration to-night. Did you not think that the noise from the dining room might reach as far as here?"

"Has it troubled you?" asked Christian looking at her attentively

"Unless one had a head of cast iron—It seems that these gentlemen have abused the liberty permitted in the country. From what Justine tells me things have taken place which would have been more appropriate at the "Femme-sans-Tete "

"Are you suffering very much?"

"A frightful neuralgia—I only wish I could sleep."

"I was wrong not to have thought of this. You will forgive me, will you not?"

Bergenheim leaned over the chair and passed his arm around the young woman's shoulders and pressed his lips to her forehead. For the first time in his life, he was playing a part upon the marital stage and he watched with the closest attention the slightest expression of his wife's face. He noticed that she shivered and that her forehead which he had lightly touched was as cold as marble.

He arose and took several turns about the room, avoiding to glance at her, for the aversion which she had just shown towards her husband, seemed to him

positive proof of the very thing he dreaded, and he feared he should not be able to contain himself.

"What is the matter with you," asked she, as she noticed his agitation.

These words brought the baron to his senses and he returned to her side, replying in a careless tone:

"I am annoyed for a very simple cause; it concerns your aunt."

"I know. She is furious against you on account of the double misfortune to her dog and coachman. You will admit that as far as Constance is concerned you are guilty."

"She is not content with being furious; she threatens a complete rupture. Here, read this."

He handed her a large letter folded lengthwise and sealed with the Corandeuil crest.

Madame de Bergenheim took the letter and read its contents aloud:

"After the unheard of and unqualifiable events of this day, the resolution which I have formed will doubtless not surprsie you in the least, monsieur. You will understand that I cannot and will not remain longer in a house where the lives of my servants and other creatures which are dear to me shall be exposed to the most deplorable, wilful injury. I have seen for some time, although I have tried to close my eyes to the light of truth, the plots that were hatched daily against all who wore the Corandeuil livery. I suppose that I should not be obliged to put an end to this highly unpleasant matter myself, but that you would underrate this charge. It seems, however, that respect and regard for women do not form part of a gentleman's duties nowadays. I shall therefore be obliged

to make up myself for the absence of such attentions and watch over the safety of the persons and other creatures that belong to me. I shall leave for Paris to-morrow. I hope that Constance's condition will permit her to endure the journey, but Baptiste's wound is too serious for me to dare to expose him. I am compelled, although with deep regret, to leave him here until he is able to travel, trusting him to the kind mercies of my niece.

"Receive, monsieur, with my adieux, my thanks for your courteous hospitality.

YOLANDE DE CORANDEUIL."

"Your aunt abuses the privileges of being foolish," said the baron, when his wife had finished reading the letter; "she deserts the battlefield and leaves behind her wounded."

"But I saw her, not two hours ago, and, although she was very angry, she did not say one word of this departure."

"Jean handed me this letter but a moment ago, clad in full livery and with the importance of an ambassador who demands his passports. You must go and talk with her, dear, and use all your eloquence to make her change her mind."

"I will go at once," said Clemence rising.

"You know that your aunt is rather obstinate when she takes a notion into her head. If she persists in this, tell her, in order to decide her to remain, that I am obliged to go to Epinal with Monsieur de Camier to-morrow morning on account of the sale of some wood land, and that I shall be absent three days at least. You understand that it will be difficult for

your aunt to leave you alone during my absence on account of these gentlemen."

"Certainly, that could not be," said she quickly.

"I do not see, as far as I am concerned, anything improper about it," said the baron trying to smile; "but we must obey the proprieties. You are too young and too pretty a mistress of the house to pass for a chaperon, and Aline, instead of being a help,* would be one inconvenience the more. So your aunt must stay here until my return."

"And by that time, Constance and Baptiste will be both cured and her anger will have passed away. You did not tell me about this trip to Epinal nor the selling of the wood land."

"Go to your aunt's room before she retires to bed," replied Bergenheim without paying any attention to this remark, and seating himself in the arm chair, "I will wait for you here. We leave to-morrow morning early and I wish to know to-night what to depend upon."

As soon as Madame de Bergenheim had left the room, Chistian arose and ran rather than walked to the space between the two windows and sought the button in the wood work of which Lambernier had told him. He soon found it and upon his first pressure the spring worked and the panel flew open. The casket was upon the shelf, he took it and carefully examined the letters which it contained. The greater part of them resembled in form the one that he possessed; some of them were in envelopes directed to Madame de Bergenheim and bore Gerfaut's crest. There was no doubt about the identity of the handwriting; if the baron had had any, these proofs were

enough. After glancing rapidly over a few of the notes, he placed them back into the casket and returned the latter to the shelf, where he found it. He then carefully closed the little door and reseated himself beside the fireplace.

When Clemence returned, her husband seemed absorbed in reading one of the books which he had found upon her table, while he mechanically played with a little bronze cup that his wife used to drop her rings in when she removed them.

"I have won my case," said the baroness in a gay tone, "my aunt saw clearly the logic of the reasons which I gave her and she defers her departure until your return."

Christian made no reply.

"That means that she will not go at all, for her anger will have time to cool off in three days; at heart she is really kind!—How long is it since you have known English?" asked she, as she noticed that her husband's attention seemed to be fixed upon a book of Lord Byron's poems.

Bergenheim threw the book on the table, raised his head and calmly gazed at his wife. In spite of all his efforts, his face had assumed an expression which would have frightened her if she had noticed it, but her eyes were fastened upon the cup which he was twisting in his hand as if it were made of clay.

"Mon Dieu! Christian, what is the matter with you, what are you doing to my poor cup?" asked she with surprise mingled with a little of that fright which is so prompt to be aroused if one feels not above reproach.

He arose and put the misshapen bronze upon the table.

"I do not know what ails me to-night," said he, "my nerves are unstrung, I will leave you, for I need rest myself. I shall start to-morrow morning before you are up and I shall return Wednesday."

"Not any later, I hope," said she with a soft sweet voice which in such circumstances very few women have the loyalty to abstain from.

He went out without replying, for he feared not to be longer master of himself; he felt, when offered this hypocritical, almost criminal, caress, as if he would like to end it all by killing her on the spot.

CHAPTER XXII.

Twenty-four hours had passed. The baron departed early the stated morning, and so did all his guests with the exception of Gerfaut and the artist. The day passed slowly and tediously. Aline had been vexed, somewhat estranged from her sister-in-law since their conversation in the little parlor. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was entirely occupied in restoring her poodle to health; Marillac, who had been drinking tea like a mandarin ever since rising, dared not present his face, which showed the effects of his debauch of the night before, to the mistress of the house, whose exacting and aristocratic austerity he very much feared. He pretended to be ill in order to delay the moment when he should be forced to make his appearance. Madame de Bergenheim did not leave her aunt and thus avoided being alone with Octave—who on account of these different complications might have spent a continual *tete-a-tete* with her had she been so inclined. Christian's absence, instead of being a signal of deliverance for the lovers seemed to have created a new misunderstanding, for Clemence felt that it would be a mean action to abuse the liberty her husband's departure gave her. She was thus very reserved during the day, when she felt that there were more facilities for yielding, but, in the evening, when alone in her apartment, this fictitious prudery disappeared. She spent the entire evening, lying upon the

divan in the little parlor, dreaming of Octave, talking to him as if he could reply, putting into practice again that capitulation of conscience which permits our mind to wander on the brink of guilt provided actions are strictly correct.

After a while this exaltation fell by degrees. When struggling earnestly, she had regarded Octave as an enemy; but, since she had gone to him as one passes over to the enemy, and, in her heart, had taken part with the lover against the husband, her courage failed her as she thought of this, and she fell weak, guilty and vanquished before the combat.

When she had played with her passion, she had given Christian little thought; she had felt it childish to bring her husband into an amusement that she believed perfectly harmless; then, when she wished to break her plaything, and found it made of iron and turning out more and more into a tyrannical yoke, she called to her aid the conjugal divinities but in too faint a voice to be heard. Now the situation had changed again. Christian was no longer the insignificant ally that the virtuous wife had condemned, through self-conceit to ignorant neutrality; he was the husband in the hostile and fearful acceptance of the word. This man would always have law on his side. Religion sometimes takes pity upon a wayward wife but society is always ready to condemn her. She was his serf fastened to him by indissoluble bonds. He had marked her with his name like a thing of his own; he held the threads of her life in his hand; he was the dispenser of her fortune, the judge of her actions and the master of their fire side. She had no dignity except through him. If he should withdraw his sup-

port for a single day, she would fall from her position without any human power being able to rescue her. Society closes its doors to the outcast wife and adds to the husband's sentence another penalty still more scathing.

Having now fallen from the sphere of illusion to that of reality, Madame de Bergenheim was wounded at every step. A bitter feeling of discouragement overwhelmed her, as she thought of the impossibility of happiness to which a deplorable fatality condemned her. Marriage and love struggled for existence, both powerless to conquer and only qualified to cause each other's death. Marriage made love a crime; love made marriage a torture. She could only choose between two abysses: shame in her love, despair in her virtue.

The hours passed rapidly, in the midst of these sad and gloomy meditations; the clock marked the hour of midnight. Madame de Bergenheim thought it time to try to sleep; but, instead of ringing for her maid, she would go to the library herself and get a book, thinking that perhaps it might aid her in going to sleep. As she opened the door leading into the closet adjoining her parlor, she saw by the light of the candle which she held in her hand something which shone like a precious stone lying upon the floor. At first she thought it might be one of her rings, but as she stopped to pick it up she saw her error. It was a ruby pin mounted in enameled gold. She recognized it, at the very first glance, as belonging to M. de Gerfaut. She picked up the pin and returned to the parlor in great trepidation. She exhausted in imagination a thousand conjectures in order to explain the pres-

ence of this object in such a place. Octave must have entered it or he could not have left this sign of his presence; it meant that he could enter her room at his will; what he had once done, he could certainly do again! The terror which this thought gave her dissipated like a dash of cold water all her former intoxicating thoughts; for, like the majority of women, she had more courage in theory than action. A moment before, she had invoked Octave's image and seated it lovingly by her side. As soon as she believed this realization possible, all she thought of was to prevent it. She was sure that her lover had never entered the closet through the parlor as he had never been in this part of the house farther than the little drawing room. Suddenly a thought of the corridor door struck her; she remembered that this door was not usually locked because the one from the library was always closed; she knew that Octave had a key to the latter and she readily understood how he had reached her apartment. Mustering up all her courage through excessive fear, she returned to the closet, hurried down the stairs and pushed the bolt. She then returned to the parlor and fell upon the divan completely exhausted by her expedition.

Little by little her emotion passed away. Her fright appeared childish to her, as soon as she believed herself sheltered from danger; she promised herself to give Octave a good scolding the next morning, then, she renounced this little pleasure, when she remembered that it would force her to admit the discovery of the pin, and of course, return it to him, for she had resolved to keep it. She had always had a particular fancy for this pin, but she would never have

dared to ask him for it, and besides, it was the fact that Octave usually wore it that made it of infinite value to her. The desire to appropriate it was irresistible, since chance had thrown it into her hands. She tied a black satin ribbon about her white neck and pinned it with the precious ruby. After kissing it as devotedly as she would a relic, she ran to her mirror to judge of the effect of the theft.

"How pretty and how I love it!" said she; "but how can I wear it so that he will not see it?"

Before she could solve this problem, she heard a slight noise which petrified her as she stood before her glass.

"It is he!" thought she; after standing for a moment half stunned she dragged herself as far as the stairs and leaning over, listened with fear and trembling. At first she could hear nothing but the beating of her heart; then she heard the other noise again and more distinctly. Somebody was turning the handle of the door trying to open it. The unexpected obstacle of the bolt doubtless exasperated the would-be visitor, for the door was shaken and pushed with a violence which threatened to break the lock or push down the door.

Madame de Bergenheim's first thought was to run into her chamber and lock the door behind her; the second showed her the danger that might result if the slightest noise should reach other ears. There was not a moment to be lost in hesitation. The young woman quickly descended the stairs and drew the bolt. The door opened softly and closed with the same precaution. The lamp from the parlor threw a feeble light upon the upper steps of the staircase, but the lower ones were in complete darkness. It was

with her heart rather than her eyes that she recognized Octave; he could only distinguish Madame de Bergenheim in an indistinct way by her white dress which was faintly outlined in the darkness; she stood before him speechless and trembling with emotion, for she had not yet thought of a speech which would send him away. He also felt that embarrassment apt to overwhelm any one guilty of so foolhardy an action. He had expected to surprise Clemence, and he found her upon her guard; the thought of the disloyal part he was playing at this moment made the blood mount to his cheeks and took away, for the time being, his ordinary assurance. He sought in vain for a speech which might first justify him and then conquer her. He had recourse to a method often employed in the absence of eloquence. He fell on his knees before the young woman and seized her hands; it seemed as if the violence of his emotions rendered him incapable of expressing himself except by silent adoration. As she felt his hands touch hers, Clemence drew back and said in a low voice:

"You disgust me!"

"Disgust!" repeated he drawing himself up to his full height.

"Yes, and that is not enough," continued she, indignantly, "I ought to say scorn instead of disgust. You deceived me when you said you loved me—you infamously deceived me!"

"But I adore you," exclaimed he with vehemence; "what proof do you wish of my love?"

"Go! go away at once. A proof, did you say? I will accept only one: go, I order it, do you understand?"

Instead of obeying her, he seized her in his arms in spite of her resistance.

"Anything but that," said he; "order me to kill myself at your feet, I will do it, but I will not go."

She tried for a moment to disengage herself, but although she used all her strength, she was unable to do so.

"Oh you are without pity," said she feebly, "but I abhor you; rather, a thousand times rather, kill me?"

Gerfaut was almost frightened by the agonized accent in which she spoke these words; he released her, but as he removed his arms, she reeled and he was obliged to support her.

"Why do you persecute me then?" murmured she as she fell in a faint upon her lover's breast.

He picked her up in his arms and mounted with difficulty the narrow stairs. Carrying her into the parlor, he placed her upon the divan. She had completely lost consciousness; one would have believed her dead from the palor of her face, were it not for a slight trembling which agitated her form every few seconds and announced a nervous attack. The most expert of lady's maids could not have removed the little ribbon from her neck, which seemed to trouble her respiration, more adroitly, than did Octave. In spite of his anxiety, he could not repress a smile as he recognized the pin which he hardly expected to find upon Clemence's neck, considering the hostile way in which she had greeted him. He knelt before her and bathed her temples with cold water, making her also breath some salts which he found upon the toilet table in the next room. Little by little, these attentions produced an effect; the nervous convulsion be-

came less frequent and a slight flush suffused the pale cheeks. She opened her eyes and then closed them as if the light troubled them, then extending her arms she passed them about Octave's neck as he leaned over her; she remained thus for some time, breathing quietly and to all appearances sleeping. Suddenly she said:

"You will give me your pin, will you not?"

"Is not all that I have yours?" replied he in a low tone.

"Mine!" continued she, in a feebly loving voice; "tell me again that you belong to me, to me alone, Octave!"

"You do not send me away any longer then? you like me to be near you?" said he with a happy smile as he kissed the young woman's brow.

"Oh! stay, I beg of you! stay with me forever!"

She folded her arms more tightly around him as if she feared he might leave her. Suddenly she sat up, opened her eyes and gazed about her in silent astonishment.

"What has happened?" said she, "and how is it that you are here? Ah! this is dreadful indeed; you have cruelly punished me for my weakness."

This sudden severity after her delicious abandon, changed Octave's pleasure into angry vexation.

"You are the one," replied he, "who are cruel! Why allow me so much bliss, if you intended to take it away from me so soon? Since you only love me in your dreams, I beg of you go to sleep again and never awaken. I will stay near you. Your words so sweet, but a moment ago, and now you deny them!"

"What did I say?" asked she with hesitation, a deep blush suffusing her face and neck.

These symptoms which he considered a bad augury increased Octave's irritation. He arose and said in a bitter tone:

"Fear nothing. I will not abuse the words which have escaped you, however flattering or charming they may have been; they told me that you loved me. I do not believe it any longer; you are agitated, I can see; but it is from fear and not love."

Clemence drew herself up, upon the divan, crossed her arms over her breast and gazed at him for a few moments in silence.

"Do you believe these two sentiments incompatible?" asked she at last "you are the only one whom I fear. Others would not complain."

There was such irresistible charm in her voice and glance that Gerfaut's ill humor melted away like ice in the sun's rays. He fell upon his knees before the divan and tried to pass her arms about his neck as before; but instead of lending herself to this project, she tried to rise.

"I am so happy at your feet," said he gently preventing her from rising. "Everybody else can sit beside you; I only have the right to kneel. Do not take this right away from me."

Madame de Bergenhiem extricated one of her hands and raising her finger with a threatening gesture, she said:

"Think a little less of your rights, and more of your duties. I advise you to obey me and to profit by my kindness which allows you to sit by my side for a moment. Think that I might be more severe and that if I treated you as you merited—If I told you to go away, would you obey me?"

Gerfaut hesitated a moment and looked at her supplicatingly.

"I would obey," said he; "but would you have the courage to order it?"

"I allow you to remain until just half past twelve," said she as she glanced at the clock which she could see through the half open door. Gerfaut followed her glance and saw that she accorded him only a quarter of an hour: but he was too clever to make any observation. He knew that the second quarter of an hour is always less difficult to obtain than the first.

"I am sure," said she, "that you have thought me capricious to-day; you must pardon me, it is a family fault. You know the saying; *Caprice de Corandeuil*?

"I wish it to be said: *Amour de Gerfaut*," said he tenderly.

"You are right to be amiable and say pleasant things to me, for I need them badly to-night. I am sad and weary; the darkest visions come before my mind. I think it is the storm which makes me feel so. How doleful this thunder is, it seems to me like an omen of misfortune."

"It is only the fancy of your vivid imagination. If you exerted the same will to be happy, that you do to imagine troubles, our life would be perfect. What matters the storm? and even if you do see an omen in it, what is there so very terrible? Clouds are vapor, thunder is a sound, both are equally ephemeral; only the blue sky, which they can obscure but for a moment, is eternal."

"Did you not hear something just now?" asked Madame de Bergenheim as she gave a sudden start and listened eagerly.

"Nothing. What did you think it was?"

"I feared that it might be Justine who had taken it into her head to come down stairs; she is so tiresome in her attentions—"

She arose and went to look in her chamber which she carefully locked; a moment later, she returned and seated herself again upon the divan.

"Justine is sleeping by this time," said Octave, I should not have ventured if I had not seen that her light was out."

Clemence took his hand and placed it over her heart

'Now then," said she, "when I tell you that I am frightened, will you believe me?"

"Poor dear," exclaimed he, as he felt her heart throbbing violently.

"You are the one who cause me these palpitations for the slightest thing. I know that we do not run any danger, that everybody is in his own room by this time, and yet somehow, I feel terribly frightened. There are women, so they say, who get used to this torture and end by being guilty and tranquil at the same time. It is an unworthy thought, but I'll confess that, sometimes, when I suffer so, I wish I were like them. But it is impossible; I was not made for wrong doing. You cannot understand this, you are a man; you love boldly, you indulge in every thought that seems sweet to you without being troubled by remorse. And then, when you suffer, your anguish at least belongs to you, nobody has any right to ask you what is the matter. But I, my tears even are not my own, I have often shed them on your account—I must hide them, for he has a right to ask: 'Why do you weep?' And what can I reply?"

She turned away her head to conceal the tears which she could not restrain; he saw them and leaning over her, he wiped them away with his lips.

"Your tears are mine!" exclaimed he passionately; "but do not distress me by telling me that our love makes you unhappy."

"Unhappy! oh yes! very unhappy! and yet I would not change this sorrow for the richest joys of others. This unhappiness is my treasure! To be loved by you! To think that there was a time when our love might have been legitimate! What fatality weighs upon us, Octave? Why did we know each other too late? I often dream a beautiful dream—a dream of freedom."

"You are free if you love me—It is the rain hitting against the windows," said he, seeing Madame de Bergenheim anxiously listening again. They kept silent for a moment, but could hear nothing, except the monotonous whistling of the storm.

"To be loved by you and not to blush!" said she as she gazed at him lovingly. "To be together always without fearing that a stroke of lightning might separate us! to give you my heart and still be worthy to pray! it would be one of those heavenly delights that one grasps only in dreams—"

"Oh! dream when I shall I be far from you; but, when I am at your feet, when our hearts beat only for each other, do not evoke, lest you destroy our present happiness, that which is beyond our power. Do you think there are bonds which can more strongly unite us? Am I not yours? And you, yourself, who speak of the gift of your heart, have you not given it to me entirely?"

"Oh! yes, entirely—And it is but right, since I owe it to you. I did not understand life until the day I received it from your eyes; since that minute I have lived, and I can die. I love you. I fail to find words to tell you one tenth of what my heart contains, but I love you—"

He received her in his arms where she took refuge so as to conceal her face after these words. She remained thus for an instant, then arose with a start, seized Octave's hands and pressed them in a convulsive manner, saying in a voice as weak as a dying woman's:

"I am lost!"

He instinctively followed Clemnece's gaze which was fastened upon the glass door. An almost imperceptible movement of the muslin curtain was to be seen. At the same moment, a slight noise, a step upon the carpet, the turning of the handle of the door, and it was silently opened as if by a ghost.

CHAPTER XXIII

Madame de Bergenheim tried to rise but her strength failed her, she fell on her knees and then dropped at her lover's feet. The latter leaped from the divan without trying to assist her, stepped over the body stretched before him and drew his poignard out of his pocket.

Christian stood upon the threshold of the door silent and motionless.

There was a moment of terrible silence. Only the eyes of the two men spoke; those of the husband were fixed, dull and implacable, those of the lover sparkled with the audacity of despair. After a moment of mutual fascination, the baron made a movement, as if to enter.

"One step more and you are a dead man!" exclaimed Gerfaut in a low voice as he clutched the handle of his poignard.

Christian extended his hand, only replying to this threat by a look; but such an imperative one that the thrust of a lance would not have been as fearful to the lover. Octave put his poignard in its sheath, ashamed of his emotion in the presence of such calm, and imitated his enemy's scornful attitude.

"Come, monsieur," said the latter in a low voice, as he took a step backwards.

Instead of following his example, Gerfaut cast a glance upon Clemence. She had fallen in such a

dead faint that he sought in vain for her breath. He leaned over her, with an irresistible feeling of pity and love: but just as he was about to take her in his arms and place her upon the divan, Bergenheim's hand stopped him. If there is a being on earth to whom one owes regard and respect it is the one whom our own wrong has rendered our enemy. Octave arose and said in a grave, resigned voice:

"I am at your orders, monsieur."

Christian pointed to the door as if to invite him to pass out first; thus preserving, with his extraordinary composure, the politeness which a good education makes an indelible habit but which at this moment was more frightful to behold than the most furious outburst of temper. Gerfaut glanced at Clemence again and said as he pointed to her:

"Shall you leave her without any aid in this condition? It is cruel."

"It is not from cruelty, but out of pity," replied the baron coldly; "she will awake only too soon."

Octave's heart was intensely oppressed but he managed to conceal his emotion. He hesitated no longer and stepped out. The husband followed without giving a look to the poor woman whose own words had condemned so inexorably. And so she was left alone in this pretty boudoir as if in a tomb.

The two men descended the stairs leading from the little closet. At the library door, they found themselves in absolute obscurity; Christian opened a dark lantern and its faint light guided their steps. They traversed, in silence, the picture gallery, the vestibule, and then mounted the main staircase. They reached the baron's apartment without meeting anybody or

betraying themselves by the slightest sound. With the same outward self-possession which had characterized his whole conduct, Christian, after carefully closing the doors, lighted a candelabra filled with candles which was upon the mantel and then turned to his companion who was far less composed than he.

Gerfaut had suffered tortures since leaving the little parlor. A feeling of regret and deepest pity at the thought of the inevitable catastrophes which must follow, had softened his heart. He saw in the most odious of colors the selfishness of his love. Clemence's last glance as she fell fainting at his feet—a forgiving and a loving glance—was like a dagger in his heart. He had ruined her! the woman he loved! the queen of his life! the angel he adored! This idea was almost like hell to him. He was almost unable to control his emotion, dizzy as he was on the brink of the abyss opened by his hand and in which he had precipitated what he counted as the dearest part of his own self.

Bergenheim stood cold and somber like a northern sky opposite this pale faced man, upon whose countenance a thousand passionate emotions were depicted like clouds on a stormy day.

When Bergenheim's eyes met Octave's, they were so full of vengeance and hatred that the latter trembled as if he had come in contact with a wild beast. The lover actually realized the inferiority of his attitude in the presence of this enraged husband. A feeling of self-pride and indignation came to his aid. He put aside remorse and regrets until later; these sad expiations were forbidden him now; another duty lay before him. There is only one reparation possible for

certain offenses. The course once open, one must go to its very end; pardon is only to be found upon the tomb of the offended.

Octave knew he had to submit to this necessity. He stifled all scruples which might have weakened his firmness and resumed his habitual disdainful look. His eyes returned his enemy's glance of deadly hatred, and he began the conversation like a man who is accustomed to master the events of his life and forbids any one to shape them for him.

"Before any explanations take place between us," he said, "I have to declare to you, upon my honor, that there is only one guilty person in this affair and that I am the one. The slightest reproach addressed to Madame de Bergenheim would be a most unjust outrage, and a most deplorable error on your part. I introduced myself into her apartment without her knowledge and without having been authorized in any way to do so. I had just entered it when you arrived. Necessity obliges me to admit a love that is an outrage to you; I am ready to repair this outrage by any satisfaction you may demand; but in putting myself at your discretion, I earnestly insist upon exculpating Madame de Bergenheim from all that can in any way affect her virtue or reputation."

"As to her reputation," said Christian; "I will watch over that; as to her virtue—"

He did not finish but his face assumed an expression of incredulous irony.

"I swear to you, monsieur," said Octave with increasing emotion, "that she is above all seduction and ought to be sheltered from all insult; I swear to you—What oath can I take that you will believe in? I

swear that Madame de Bergenheim has never betrayed any of her duties toward you; that I have never received the slightest encouragement from her; that she is as innocent of my folly as the angels in heaven."

Christian shook his head with a scornful smile.

"This day will be the undying remorse of my life if you will not believe me," said Gerfaut with almost uncontrolled vehemence; "I tell you, monsieur, she is innocent; innocent! do you understand me? I was lead astray by my passion. I wished to profit by your absence. You know that I have a key to the library; I used it without her suspecting it. Would to God that you could have been a witness of our tete-a-tete! you would then have not one doubt left. Can one prevent a man from entering a lady's room when he has succeeded in finding the way to it in spite of her wishes? I repeat it, she—"

"Enough, monsieur," replied the baron coldly. "You are doing as I should do in your place; but this discussion is out of place; let this woman disculpate herself. There should be no mention of her between us now."

"When I protest that upon my honor—"

"Monsieur, under such circumstances, a false oath is not dishonorable. I have been a bachelor myself and I know that anything is allowable against a husband. Let us drop this, I beg of you, and return to facts. I consider that I have been insulted by you and you must give me satisfaction for this insult."

Octave made a sign of acquiescence.

"One of us must die," replied Bergenheim leaning his elbow negligently upon the mantel. The lover bowed his head a second time.

"I have offended you," said he, "you have the right to choose the reparation due you."

"There is only one possible, monsieur. Blood alone can wipe away the disgrace; you know it as well as I. You have dishonored my home, you owe me your life for that. If Fate favors you, you will be rid of me and I shall be wronged in every way. There are arrangements to be made and we shall settle them at once if you are willing."

He pushed an arm chair toward Gerfaut and took another himself.

They seated themselves beside a desk which stood in the middle of the room and with an equal appearance of sang froid and polite haughtiness they discussed this murderous combat.

"It is not necessary for me too say to you," said Octave, "that I accept in advance whatever you may decide upon; the weapons, place and seconds—"

"Listen to me then," interrupted Bergenheim; "you just now spoke in favor of this woman in such a way that made me think that you did not wish her ruined in the eyes of the world; so I trust you will accept the proposition I am about making to you. An ordinary duel would arouse suspicion, and inevitably lead to a discovery of the truth; people would seek for some plausible motive for the encounter, whatever story we might tell our seconds. You know that there is but one motive which will be found acceptable by society, for a duel between a young man who has been received as a guest of this house and the husband. In whatever way this duel may terminate, this woman's honor would remain on the ground with the dead, and that is what I wish to avoid, since she bears my name."

"Will you explain to me what your plan is?" asked Octave, who could not see what his adversary was leading up to.

"You know, monsieur," continued Begernheim in his calm voice, "that I had a perfect right to kill you a moment ago; I did not do so for two reasons; first a gentleman should use his sword and not a poignard, and then your dead body would have embarrassed me."

"The river is close by!" interrupted Gerfaut with a strange smile.

Christian looked at him fixedly for a moment and then replied in a slightly changed tone:

"Instead of availing myself of my right, I am going to risk my life against yours. The danger is the same for myself, who have never insulted you, as for you who have offered me the deadliest insult that one man can offer another. I am willing to spill my blood but not to soil my honor."

"If it is a duel without seconds that you desire, you have my consent; I have perfect confidence in your loyalty, and I hope you can say the same for mine."

Christian bowed his head slightly and continued:

"It is more than a duel without seconds, for the whole affair must be so contrived as to be looked upon as an accident; it is the only way to prevent the outbreak and scandal I dread so much. Now here is my proposition: You know that there is a wild boar hunt to take place to-morrow in the Mares woods. When we station ourselves we will be placed together at a spot I know of, where we shall be out of the sight of the other hunters. When the boar crosses the en-

closure we will fire a signal agreed upon. In this way, the denouement, whatever it may be, will be looked upon as one of those accidents which so frequently happen in shooting parties."

"I am a dead man," thought Gerfaut, as he saw that the gun would be the weapon chosen by his adversary, and he recalled his wonderful skill of which he had had many and various proofs. But instead of showing the slightest hesitation, his countenance grew still more arrogant.

"This kind of combat seems to me very wisely planned," said he; "I accept, for I desire as much as you that this affair should remain an eternal secret."

"Since we are to have no seconds," continued Bergenheim, "let us arrange everything so that nothing can betray us; it is inconceivable how the most trifling circumstances often turn out crushing evidence. I think that I have foreseen everything. If you find that I have forgotten any detail, please remind me of it. The place I speak of is a narrow, well shaded path. The ground is perfectly level; it lies from north to south, so that at eight o'clock in the morning the sun will be on that side; there will be no advantage in position. There is an old elm on the borders of the wood; at fifty steps, distance in the pathway, there is the trunk of an oak which has been felled this year; these are the two places where we will station ourselves, if you consent to it. Is it the proper distance?"

"Near or farther, it matters little. Breast to breast if you like."

"Nearer would be imprudent. However, fifty steps

with the gun is less than fifteen with a pistol. This point is settled. We will remain with heads covered, although this is not the custom. A ball might strike the head where the cap would be and if this should happen it would arouse suspicions as people do not hunt bare-headed. It only remains to decide who shall fire first" continued Christian.

"You of course; you are the offended one."

"You do not admit the full offence to have been committed, and since this is in doubt, and I cannot be judge and jury together, we shall consult chance.

"I declare to you that I will not fire first," interrupted Gerfaut.

"Remember that it is a mortal duel and such scruples are foolish. Let us agree that whoever has the first shot, shall place himself upon the border of the woods and await the signal which the other will give when the boar crosses the enclosure."

He took a gold piece from his purse and threw it in the air.

"Heads!" said the lover, ready to acquiesce to the least of his adversary's conditions.

"Fate is for you," said Christian looking at the coin with marked indifference; "but, remember, if at the signal given by me, you do not fire or only fire in the air, I shall use my right to shoot—You know that I rarely miss my aim."

These preliminaries ended, the baron took two guns from his closet loaded them, taking particular care to show that they were of equal length and the same calibre. He then locked them up in the closet and offered Gerfaut the key.

"I would not do you this injustice," said the latter.

"This precaution is hardly necessary, since, to-morrow, you will take your choice of those weapons. Now that everything is arranged," continued he in a graver tone, "I have one request to make of you, and I think you are too loyal to refuse it. Swear to me that whatever may be the result, you will keep all this a profound secret. My honor is now in your hands; speaking as a gentleman to a gentleman, I ask you to respect it."

"If I have the sad privilege of surviving you," replied Gerfaut no less solemnly, "I swear to you to keep the secret inviolated. But supposing a contrary event, I also have a request to make to you. What are your intentions as regards Madame de Bergenheim?"

Christian gazed at his adversary a moment, with a searching glance which seemed to read his innermost thoughts.

"My intentions?" said he at last, in a displeased, surprised tone, "this is a very strange question; I do not recognize your right to ask it."

"My right is certainly strange," said the lover with a bitter smile; "but whatever it may be, I shall make use of it. I have destroyed this woman's happiness forever; if I cannot repair this fault, at least I ought to mitigate the effects as much as lies in my power. Will you reply to me; if I die to-morrow what will be her fate?"

Bergenheim kept silent, his somber eyes lowered to the floor.

"Listen to me, monsieur," continued Gerfaut with great emotion; "when I said to you: 'She is not guilty,' you did not believe me and I despair of ever

persuading you for I know well what your suspicions must be. However, these are the last words addressed to you that will leave my mouth, and you know that one has to believe a dying man's statement. If to-morrow you avenge yourself, I earnestly beg of you, let this reparation suffice. All my pride is gone; you see, since I beg this of you upon my bended knees. Be humane towards her; spare her, monsieur. It is not her pardon which I ask you to grant her, it is pity for her unsullied innocence. Treat her kindly—honorably. Do not make her too wretched."

He stopped, for his voice failed him and his eyes filled with tears.

"I know what I ought to do," replied the baron in as harsh a tone as Gerfaut's had been tender; "I am her husband, and I do not recognize anybody's right, yours least of all, to interpose between us."

"I can foresee the fate which you have in reserve for her," replied the lover indignantly; "you will not murder her, for that would be too imprudent; what would become of your vaunted honor then? But you will slowly kill her; you will make her die a new death every day in order to satisfy a blind vengeance. You are a man to meditate over each new torture as calmly as you have regulated every detail of our duel."

Bergenheim, instead of replying, lighted a candle as if to put an end to this discussion.

"Until to-morrow, monsieur," said he with a cold air.

"One moment," exclaimed Gerfaut, as he arose, "you refuse to give me one word which will assure me of the fate of the woman whose life I have ruined?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Very well then, I will protect her, and I will do it in spite of you and against you."

"Not another word," sternly interrupted the baron.

Octave leaned over the table which was between them and looked at him for a moment, then said in a terrible voice:

"You killed Lambernier!"

Christian bounded backwards as if he had been struck.

"I was a witness of that murder," continued Gerfaut slowly as he emphasized each word; "I will write my deposition and give it to a man of whom I am as sure as of myself. If I die to-morrow, I will leave him a mission which no effort on your part will prevent him from fulfilling. He shall watch over your slightest actions with inexorable vigilance; he will be Madame de Bergenheim's protector if you forget that your first duty is to protect her. The day upon which you abuse your position as regards her, the day when she shall call out despairingly: 'help me!' that day shall my deposition be placed in the hands of the public prosecutor at Nancy. He will believe its contents; of that you may be certain. Besides the river is an indiscreet tomb; before long it will give up the body you have confided to it. You will be tried and condemned. You know the punishment for murder! It is hard labor for life."

Bergenheim darted toward the mantel at these words and seized a hunting-knife which hung there. Octave, as he saw him ready to strike, crossed his arms upon his breast and said coldly:

"Remember that my body might embarrass you; one corpse is enough."

The baron threw the weapon on the floor with such force that he broke it in two.

"But it was you," said he in a trembling voice, "you were Lambernier's assassin—He knew this infamous secret, and, his death was involuntary on my part."

"The intention is of little account. The deed is the question. There is not a jury that will not condemn you and that is what I wish, for such a sentence would bring a legal separation between you and your wife and give her her liberty."

"You are not speaking seriously," said Christian turning pale; "you, a gentleman, would not denounce me! And besides, would not my being sentenced also injure the woman in whom you take so much interest?"

"I know all that," replied Gerfaut; "I also cling to the honor of my name and yet I expose it. I have plenty of enemies who will be glad enough to outrage my memory. Public opinion will condemn me, for they will only see the action and that is odious. There is one thing, however, more precious and necessary to me than the world's opinion, and that is peace for every day, the right to live; and that is, why, happiness having forsaken me, I am going to bequeath it to the one whom fate has put in your power, but whom I shall not leave to your mercy."

"I am her husband," replied Bergenheim angrily.

"Yes, you are her husband; so the law is on your side. You have only to call upon society for its aid; it will come but too gladly at your call and help you crush a defenceless woman. And I, who love her, as you have never known how to love her, I can do nothing for her! Living, I must keep silent and bow before your will; but dead, your absurd laws no longer exist

for me; dead, I can place myself between you and her, and I will do it. Since, in order to aid her, I have no choice of arms, I will not recoil from the one weapon which presents itself. Yes, if in order to save her from your vengeance, I am obliged to resort to the shame of a denunciation, I swear to you here, I will turn out informer. I will sully my name with this stain; I will pick up this stone in the mud and I will crush your head with it."

"These are a coward's words!" exclaimed Christian as he fell back in his chair.

Gerfaut looked at him with a calm, stony glance, while replying:

"No insults, please! One of us will not be living to-morrow. Remember what I tell you: if I fall in this duel, it will be to your interest to have this matter stop right then and there. I submit to death myself; but I exact liberty for her—liberty with peace and respect. Think it over, monsieur; at the first outrage, I will arise from my tomb to prevent a second, and dig a trench between you and her which can never be crossed—the penitentiary!"

CHAPTER XXIV

After she came out of her faint, Madame de Bergenheim remained for a long time in a dazed condition, and did not realize, save in a confused manner, her real position. She vaguely saw, at her first glance, the curtains of the bed upon which she lay and thought that she had awakened from an ordinary sleep. Little by little, her thoughts became clearer and she saw that she was fully dressed, also that her room seemed brighter than it usually was with only her night lamp lit. She noticed between the half open curtains a gigantic form reflected almost to the ceiling opposite her bed. She sat up and distinctly saw a man sitting in the corner by the fire-place. Frozen with terror, she fell back upon her pillow as she recognized her husband. Then she remembered everything, even the slightest details of the scene in the small parlor. She felt ready to faint again when she heard Christian's steps upon the carpet, although he walked with great precaution.

The baron looked at her a moment and then opening the bed curtains, he said:

"You cannot pass the night thus, it is nearly three o'clock. You must go to bed as usual."

Clemence shivered at these words, whose accent, however, was not hard. She mechanically obeyed; but she had hardly risen, when she was obliged to re-

cline upon the bed, for her trembling limbs would not support her.

"Do not be afraid of me," said Bergenheim drawing back a few steps, "my presence ought not to frighten you. I only wish that people should know that I have passed the night in your chamber for it is possible that my return may arouse suspicion. You know that our love is only a comedy played for the benefit of our servants."

There was such affected lightness in these remarks that the young woman was cut to the very quick. She had expected an explosion of anger, but not this calm contempt. Her revolted pride gave her courage.

"I do not deserve to be treated thus," said she; "do not condemn me without a hearing."

"I ask nothing of you," replied Christian who seated himself again beside the mantel; "undress yourself and go to sleep if it is possible for you to do so. It is not necessary for Justine to make any comments to-morrow about your day clothes not having been removed."

Instead of obeying him, she went towards him and tried to remain standing in order to speak to him, but her emotion was so intense that it took away her strength and she was obliged to sit down.

"You treat me too cruelly, Christian," said she when she had succeeded to recover her voice. "I am not guilty; at least, not so much as you think I am—" said she dropping her head.

He looked at her attentively for a moment, and then replied in a voice which did not betray the slightest emotion:

"You must know that my greatest desire is to be

persuaded of this by you. I know that too often appearances are deceitful; perhaps you will be able to explain to me what has taken place last evening; I am still inclined to believe your word. Swear to me that you do not love Monsieur de Gerfaut."

"I swear it," said she in a weak voice and without raising her eyes.

He went to the bed and took down a little silver crucifix which was hanging above it.

"Swear it to me upon this crucifix," said he presenting it to his wife.

She tried in vain to raise her hand which seemed fastened to the arm of her chair.

"I swear it," stammered she a second time while her face became as pale as death.

A savage laugh escaped Christian's lips. He put the crucifix in its place again without saying a word, then he opened the secret panel and taking out the casket placed it upon the table before his wife. She made a movement as if to seize it, but her courage failed her.

"You have perjured yourself to your husband and God!" said Bergenheim slowly. "Do you know what kind of a woman you are?"

Clemence remained for some time powerless to reply; her respiration was so painful that each breath seemed like suffocation; her head, after rolling about on the back of the chair, fell upon her breast, like a blade of grass broken and bruised by the rain.

"If you have read those letters," murmured she, when she had strength enough to speak, "you ought to know that I am not as unworthy as you think. I am very guilty—but I still have a right to be forgiven."

Christian, at this moment, had he been gifted with the intelligence which fathoms the mysteries of the heart, might have renewed the bonds which were so near being broken; he could at least have stopped Clemence upon a dangerous path and saved her from a most irreparable fall. But his nature was too unrefined for him to see the degrees which separate weakness from vice, and the intoxication of a loving heart from the depravity of a corrupt character. With the obstinacy of narrow minded people, he had been looking at the whole thing in its worst light, and for several hours already, he had decided upon his wife's guilt in his own mind; this served now as a foundation for his stern conduct. His features remained perfectly impassive as he listened to Clemence's words of justification which she uttered in a weak, broken voice.

"I know that I merit your hatred—but if you could know how much I suffer, you would surely forgive me—You left me in Paris very young, inexperienced; I ought to have fought against this feeling better than I did, but I used up in this struggle all the strength that I had—You can see how pale and changed I have become within the past year. I have aged several years in those few months; I am not yet what you call a—a lost woman. He ought to have told you that—"

"O! he has; of course he has," replied Christian with bitter irony; "Oh! you have in him a loyal cavalier!"

"You do not believe me then! you do not believe me!" continued she, wringing her hands in despair; "but, read these letters, the last ones. See if **one** writes like this to a woman who is entirely lost—"

She tried to take the package which her husband held; instead of giving the letters to her, he lighted them to the candle-light and then threw them into the fire-place. Clemence uttered a cry and darted forward to save them, but Christian's iron hand seized her and pushed her back into her chair.

"I understand how much you care for this correspondence," said he in a more excited tone, "but you are more loving than prudent. Let me destroy one witness which accuses you. Do you know that I already killed a man on account of these letters?"

"Killed!" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim whom this word drove almost to madness, for she could not understand its real meaning and applied it to her lover. "Well then, kill me too, for I lied when I said that I repented. I do not repent! I am guilty! I deceived you! I love him and I abhor you; I love him! kill me!"

She fell upon her knees, before him and dragged herself along the floor striking her head upon it as if she wished to break it. Christian raised her up and seated her in the chair in spite of her resistance. She struggled in her husband's arms and the only words which she uttered were: "I love him! kill me! I love him! kill me!"

Her grief was so intense that Bergenheim really pitied her.

"You did not understand me," said he, "he is not the man I killed."

She became motionless, dumb. He left her then from a feeling of compassion and returned to his seat. They remained for some time seated in this way, one on each side of the fire-place; he, with his head lean-

ing against the mantel; she, crouched in her chair with her face concealed behind her hands; only the striking of the clock interrupted this silence and lulled their gloomy thoughts with its monotonous vibrations.

A sharp quick sound against one of the windows interrupted this sad scene. Clemence arose suddenly as if she had received a galvanic shock; her frightened eyes met her husband's. He made an imperious gesture with his hand as if to order silence, and both of them listened attentively and anxiously.

The same noise was heard a second time. A rattling against the blinds was followed by a dry metallic sound, evidently caused by the contact of some body against the window.

"It is some signal," said Christian in a low voice as he looked at his wife. "You ought to know what it means."

"I do not, I swear it to you," replied Clemence, her heart throbbing with a new emotion.

"I will tell you then; he is there and he has something to say to you. Rise and open the window."

"Open the window?" said she with a frightened look.

"Do what I tell you. Do you wish him to pass the night under your window so that the servants may see him?"

At this command, spoken in a severe tone, she arose. Noticing that their shadows might be seen from the outside when the curtains were drawn, Bergenheim changed the candles to another place. Clemence walked slowly toward the window; she had hardly opened it, when a purse fell upon the floor.

"Close it now," said the baron. While his wife was

quietly obeying, he picked up the purse and opening it, took the following note from it:

"I have ruined you, you for whom I would gladly have died! But what use are regrets and despair now? And my blood will not wipe away your tears. Our position is so frightful that I tremble to speak of it. I ought to tell you the truth however horrible it may be—Do not curse me, Clemence; do not impute to me this fatality which obliges me to thus torture you. In a few hours, I shall have expiated the wrongs of my love or you yourself may be free. Free! pardon me for using this word, I know it is an odious one to you, but I am too troubled to find another. Whatever happens I am going to put within your reach the only aid which it is possible for me to offer you; it will at least give you a choice of unhappiness. If you never see me again, to live with him will be a torture beyond your strength perhaps, for you love me. I do not know how to express my thoughts and I dare not offer you advice or entreat you. All that I feel is the necessity of telling you that my whole life belongs to you, that I am yours until death; but I hardly dare have the courage to lay at your feet the offering of a destiny already so sad and which may soon be stained with blood—A fatal necessity sometimes imposes actions which public opinion condemns but the heart excuses, for it alone understands them. Do not get angry at what you are about to read; never did words like these come out of a more desolate heart. During the whole day a post-chaise will wait for you at the rear of the Montigny plateau; a fire lighted upon the rock which you can see from your room will notify you of its presence. In a short time it can reach the

Rhine. A person devoted to you will accompany you to Munich to the house of one of my relatives whose character and position will assure you sufficient protection from all tyranny. There at least you will be permitted to weep. That is all that I can do for you. My heart is broken when I think of the powerlessness of my love. They say that when one crushes the scorpion which has wounded him, he is cured; even my death will not repair the wrong that I have done you; it will only be one grief the more. Can you understand how desperate the feeling is which I experience now? For months past, to be loved by you has been the sole desire of my heart, and now I must repent ever having attained it. Out of pity for you, I ought to wish that you did love me with a love as perishable as my life, so that a remembrance of me would leave you in peace—All this is so sad that I have not the courage to continue. Adieu, Clemence! Once more, one last time, I must say: I love you! and yet, I dare not. I feel unworthy to speak to you thus, for my love has become a disastrous gift. Did I not ruin you? The only word that seems to be permissible is the one that even a murderer dares to address to his God: pardon me!"

After reading this, the baron passed the letter to his wife without saying a word and resumed his somber attitude.

"You see what he asks of you?" said he after rather a long pause, as he observed the dazed way in which Madame de Bergenheim's eyes wandered over this letter.

"My head is bewildered," replied she, "I do not understand what he says—Why does he speak of death?"

Christian's lips curled disdainfully as he answered:
"It does not concern you; one does not kill women."

"They need it not to die," replied Clemence who gazed at her husband with wild haggard eyes.

"Then you are going to fight?" asked she.

"Really, have you divined as much!" he replied with an ironical smile; "it is a wonderful thing how quick is your intelligence! You have spoken the truth. You see, each of us has his part to play. The wife deceives her husband; the husband fights with the lover, and the lover, in order to close the comedy in a suitable manner—proposes to run away with the wife—for that is the meaning of his letter, notwithstanding all his oratorical precautions."

"You are going to fight?" she exclaimed with the energy of despair. "You are going to fight! And for me! unworthy and miserable creature that I am! What have you done? And is he not free to love? I, alone, am the guilty one, I alone have offended you, and I alone deserve punishment. Do with me what you will; shut me up in a convent or a cell; bring me poison, I will drink it."

The baron burst into a sardonic laughter.

"So you are afraid that I shall kill him?" said he gazing at her intently with his arms crossed upon his breast.

"I fear for you, for us all. Do you think that I can live after having caused blood to be shed? If there must be a victim, take me—or, at least, commence with me. Have pity, tell me that you will not fight."

"But think—there is an even chance that you may be set free!" said he.

"Spare me!" murmured she, shivering with horror.

"It is a pity that blood must be shed, is it not?" said Bergenheim in a mocking tone; "adultery would be pleasant but for that. I am sure that you think me coarse and brutal to look upon your honor as a serious thing when you do not do so yourself."

"I entreat you!"

"I am the one who has to entreat you. This astonishes you, does it not?—While I live, I shall protect your reputation in spite of yourself; but if I die, try to guard it yourself. Content yourself with having betrayed me, do not outrage my memory. I am glad now that we have no children for I should fear for them and should feel obliged to deprive you of their care as much as lay in my power. That is one trouble the less. But as you bear my name and I cannot take it away from you, I beg of you, do not drag it in the mire when I shall not be here to wash it for you."

The young woman fell back upon her seat as if every fiber in her body had been successively torn to pieces.

"You crush me to the earth!" said she feebly.

"This revolts you," continued the husband who seemed to choose the most cutting thrust; "you are young; this is your first error, you are not made for such adventures. But rest assured, one becomes accustomed to everything. A lover always knows how to find the most beautiful phrases with which to console a widow and vanquish her repugnances. He has already commenced in this letter. If you become free, he shall speak to you of Italy, England, America? He will tell you that one may live anywhere; that if crime—oh! he will not say crime; he will say passion, suppressed love—that if your love is forbid-

den in France, you can walk almost anywhere else with head aloft and proud mien.

"You are killing me—murmured she, falling back almost unconscious in her chair.

Christian leaned over her and taking her by the arm said in a low tone:

"Remember, if I die and he asks you to follow him, you will be an infamous creature if you obey him. He is a man to glory in you; that is easy enough to see. He is a man who would drag you after him—"

"Oh! have pity—I shall die—"

Clemence closed her eyes and her lips twitched convulsively. As the baron saw her slip from the arm-chair, he at last felt some slight pity for her. After having tortured her unmercifully, he was affected and almost disarmed by her physical suffering. He undressed her and carried her to her bed without her making the slightest movement. He knew that there was nothing dangerous in her condition and left her as soon as he saw her eyes open, reseating himself by the mantel. The rest of the night passed without any new incident. To see this man sitting there silent, with his head buried in his hands, and this woman lying stretched upon her bed as pale and dumb as death, one would have supposed this to be a death-watch instead of a conjugal tete-a-tete.

The first rays of the morning sun fell upon another scene in the opposite wing of the chateau. Marillac was quietly sleeping the sleep of the just when he was suddenly awakened by a shaking that nearly threw him out of his bed.

"Go to the devil!" said he angrily when he succeeded

in half opening his heavy eyes and recognized Gerfaut standing beside his bed.

"Get up!" said the latter taking him by the arm to give more force to his command.

The artist covered himself with the clothes up to his chin.

"Are you walking in your sleep or insane?" asked Marillac, "or do you want me to go to work?" added he as he saw that his friend had some papers in his hand. "You know very well I never have any ideas when fasting and that I am stupid until noon."

"Get up at once," said Gerfaut, "I must have a talk with you."

There was something so serious and urgent in Gerfaut's accent as he said these words that the artist got up at once and hurriedly dressed himself.

"What is the matter?" asked he, as he put on his dressing gown, "you look as if the affairs of the nation rested upon you."

"Put on your coat and boots," said Octave, "you must go to La Fauconnerie. They are used to seeing you go out early in the morning for your appointments with Reine, and therefore—"

"It is to this shepherdess you would send me!" interrupted the artist as he commenced to undress himself; "in that case I will go to bed again. Enough of that!"

"I am to fight with Bergenheim at nine o'clock!" said Gerfaut in a low voice.

"Stupendous!" exclaimed Marillac, as he jumped back a few steps and then stood as motionless as a statue. Without wasting any time in unnecessary explanations, his friend gave him a brief account of the night's events.

"Now," said he, "I need you; can I count upon your friendship?"

"In life and death!" exclaimed Marillac and he pressed his hand with the emotion that the bravest of men feel at the approach of a danger which threatens one who is dear to them.

"Here," said Gerfaut as he handed him the papers in his hand, "is a letter for you in which you will find my instructions in full; they will serve you as a guide, according to circumstances. This sealed paper will be deposited by you in the office of the public prosecutor at Nancy, under certain circumstances which my note explains. Lastly, this is my will. I have no very near relative; I have made you my heir."

"May I become an academician if I accept your inheritance!" interrupted the artist in a trembling voice as he turned away his head to conceal an emotion which under the circumstances was out of place, according to his ideas.

"Listen to me; I do not know a more honest man than you, that is why I select you. First, this legacy is a trust. I speak to you now in case of events which probably will never happen, but which I ought to prepare for. I do not know what effect this may have upon Clemence's fate; her aunt, who is very austere, may quarrel with her and deprive her of her rights; her personal fortune is not very large, I believe, and I know nothing about her marriage settlement. She may thus be entirely at her husband's mercy, and that is what I will not allow. My fortune is therefore a trust that you will hold to be placed at her disposal at any time. I hope that she loves me enough not to refuse this service of me."

"Well and good!" said Marillac; "I will admit that the thought of inheriting from you choked me like a noose around my neck."

"I beg of you to accept for yourself my copyrights as author. You cannot refuse that," said Gerfaut with a half smile; "this legacy belongs to the domain of art. Who should I leave it to if not to you my Patroclus, my faithful collaborator?"

The artist took several agitated turns about his room, then said:

"I would rather all the dramas and vaudevilles, past and present, were at the bottom of the Seine than that this duel should take place. However, in case of an accident, I accept your legacy. I will use it in publishing a complete edition of your works, on large paper, which shall surpass Chateaubriand's."

Gerfaut pressed his hand and said with a smile:

"Kind fellow! You still believe in fame. Truly, I think very little of mine; still, I am grateful for your idea. If you carry out your good intentions of bringing out a complete edition of my works, put as a frontispiece my portrait by Deveria. The two other portraits of mine, are so horrible I blush to think of them. I do not wish that posterity, the guardian of my memory, should get an idea that I was such an ugly looking fellow."

These sarcastic words redoubled Marillac's sadness and emotion.

"To think," exclaimed he, "that I was the one who saved this Bergenheim's life! If he kills you, I will never forgive myself. And yet, I told you this would end in some tragic manner."

"What business had he there? Is it not so? What

can I say? We were seeking for a drama; here it is. I am not anxious on my own account, but on hers. Unhappy woman! A duel is a stone that might fall upon a man's head twenty times a day; it is sufficient for a simpleton if you stare at him, or for an awkward fellow if you tread upon his toes; but on her account—poor angel!—I cannot think of it. I need the fullest command of my head and my heart. But it is growing lighter; there is not a moment to lose. You go to the stable; saddle a horse yourself, if there is no servant up; go, as I said, to La Fauconnerie; I have often seen a postchaise in the tavern court-yard; order it to wait all day at the back of the Montigny plateau. You will find everything explained in detail in the note which I have given you. Here is my purse; I need no money."

Marillac put the purse in his pocket and the papers in his memorandum book; he then buttoned up his redingote and put on his traveling cap. His countenance showed a state of exaltation which belied, for the time being, the pacific theories he had expounded a few days before.

"You can depend upon me as upon yourself," said he with energy. "If this poor woman calls for my aid, I promise you that I will serve her faithfully. I will take her wherever she wishes; to China if she asks it, and in spite of the whole police force. If Bergenheim kills you and then follows her up, there will be another duel."

As he said these words, he took his stiletto and a pair of pistols from the mantel and put them in his pocket after having examined the edge of the one and the caps of the others.

"Adieu!" said Gerfaut.

"Adieu!" said the artist whose extreme agitation contrasted strongly with his friend's calm. "Rest easy. "I will look after her—and I will publish a complete edition—But what an idea to have accepted a duel as irregular as this! Have you ever seen him use a gun? He had no right to exact this."

"Hurry; you must leave before the servants are up."

"Kiss me, my poor fellow," said Marillac with tears in his eyes; "it is not very manly I know, but I cannot help it—Oh! these women! I adore them of course; but just now I am like Nero, I wish that they all had but one head—It is for these little, worthless dolls that we kill each other!"

"You can curse them on your way," said Gerfaut who was impatient to see him leave.

"O, good gracious, yes—They can flatter themselves this moment that they all inspire me with a deadly hatred."

"Do not make any noise," said his friend as he carefully opened the door.

Marillac pressed his hand for the last time and went out. When he reached the end of the corridor, he stopped a moment, then went back.

"Above all things," said he as he passed his head through the half open door, "no foolish proceedings. Remember that it is necessary that one of you should fall, and that if you fail, he will not. Take your time—aim—and fire at him as you would at a rabbit."

After this last piece of advice, he went away; ten minutes after he had left, Gerfaut saw him riding out of the court yard as fast as Beverley's four legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XXV

The most radiant sun that ever gilded a beautiful September day had arisen upon the castle. The whole valley was as fresh and laughing as a young girl who has just left her bath. The rocks seemed to have a band of silver surrounding them; the woods a mantel of green draped over their shoulders.

There was an unusual excitement in the court-yard of the chateau. The servants were coming and going, the dogs were starting a concert of irregular barks, and the horses were jumping about sharing their instinctive presentiment and trying to break away from the bridles which held them. The order to depart put this joyous troop in motion. The *traqueurs* under the guide of an experienced huntsman, left the court and took the road to the woods through the park, thus shortening the distance. A keeper went ahead with the dogs through the sycamore avenue. Soon a little group of huntsmen, composed of nearly the same party we have met before, descended the chateau steps, led by the master of the house. Some of them mounted horses which were awaiting them, the rest occupied a cart with boards put across for seats. Aline's rosy face smiled out of one of the windows and the majestic countenance of Mademoiselle de Corandeuil appeared at another on the next floor, as the prim old maid did not disdain to wish the hunters a lucky day. After gayly saluting the two ladies, the troop left the court

to the music of the hunting horns, which sounded the signal for departure.

The baron seated in his saddle with his usual military attitude and a cigar in his mouth, went from one to the other speaking in a joking tone which prevented anybody from suspecting his secret thoughts. If he succeeded in carrying himself so well as to deceive the most clear-sighted, he could not entirely conceal the effects of the violent passions imprinted upon his face which was paler than usual and bore the traces of two nights of sleeplessness. Gerfaut, on his side, had exerted every effort to impose upon his countenance that impassible serenity which guards the heart's secrets, but had not succeeded as well. His affectation of gaiety betrayed continual restraint; the smile which he forced upon his lips left the rest of his face cold and never removed the wrinkle between his brows. An incident, perhaps sadly longed for but unhopd for increased this gloomy melancholy expression. Just as the cavalcade passed before the English garden which separated the sycamore walk from the wing of the chateau occupied by Madame de Bergenheim, Octave slackened the pace of his horse and lingered behind the rest of his companions; his eyes closely examined each of the windows; the blinds to her sleeping room were only half closed; behind the panes, he saw the curtains move and then separate. A pale face appeared for a moment between the blue folds like an angel who peeps through the sky to gaze upon the earth. Gerfaut raised himself up on his stirrups so as to drink in this apparition as long as possible, but he dared not make one gesture of adieu. As he was still endeavoring to obtain one more glance, he saw that the baron was at his side.

"Play your role better," said he to him; "we are surrounded by spies. Camier has already made an observation about your preoccupied demeanor."

"You are right," said Octave; "and you join example to advice. I admire your coolness, but I despair of equalling it."

"You must mingle with my guests and talk with them," replied Christian. "After the accident, our slightest gesture will be commented upon if they have the least suspicion. Remember that this woman's honor depends upon your prudence."

He started off on a trot; Gerfaut followed his example, stifling a sigh as he darted a last glance toward the chateau. They soon rejoined the cart which carried several of the hunters and which Monsieur de Camier drove with the assurance of a professional coachman.

"Good news, gentlemen!" said Bergenheim. "The viscount has promised to write some verses in honor of the one among us who shall kill the wild boar. Is it not so, Gerfaut?"

"Certainly," replied the latter in the same tone; "and I have an idea that you will be the hero of that ditty."

"You are perfectly capable of it, baron," said an old gentleman as he pulled up his coat-collar to protect his ears from the sharp wind, "I will wager you could not resist the temptation, and that this hunting party is what made you shorten your visit to Epinal."

"You are not very gallant to-day," interrupted the public prosecutor; "don't you think then that our host has stronger reasons to hasten his return home than a wild boar hunt?"

"Good gracious, it never entered my head to establish the slightest comparison between Madame de Bergenheim and a wild boar," said Monsieur de Camier, who was not disposed to receive a lesson in politeness from his neighbor; "I am too pronounced an admirer of the beautiful baroness. You allow me to, don't you, Bergenheim? it is of no importance, at my age. One thing is incontestable and that is that you have a pretty and charming wife."

"Enchanting!" added the prosecutor.

"Madame la baronne is the pearl of our mountains," observed a man of little wit who was seated upon the second seat.

"And you can boast of being a happy husband," continued the prosecutor.

"I think as you do," said Christian in his natural tone; "I am entirely of your opinion."

"Here is a phenomenon!" exclaimed Monsieur de Camier, "a husband satisfied with his condition! You were deucedly lucky to be so successful; for marriage is a lottery in which few gain prizes; to secure a good wife is almost harder than drawing a lucky number"

"Like drawing an eel out of a bag of vipers," continued the man with little wit, with such a melancholy look that it was only natural to suppose that the vipers had bitten him.

"Gentlemen, you judge women too severely," said Gerfaut making an effort to join in the conversation.

"Bravo! vicomte," said Bergenheim; "I am glad to know that you have such good sentiments. We will marry you one of these days and you will also find a prize."

Monsieur de Camier nudged his neighbor with his elbow, and whispered:

"What will you bet that our neighbor has an idea of marrying the vicomte with Mademoiselle Aline? Notice how much he makes of him. The little sister has money."

"Do you think that he is rich too?" replied the magistrate in the same tone.

"Hum! hum! I think that he lives the high life of all these Parisian swells. They say that he makes a great deal of money from his books; for he is nothing more than a scribbler, after all!"

"It is certain that they are very good friends," said the prosecutor who was duped as well as his neighbor by the comedy which the two men played.

There was a moment's silence broken only by the trot of the horses and the sound of the wheels upon the level ground.

"What the devil ails your dogs?" exclaimed Monsieur de Camier suddenly as he turned to the baron who was riding behind him. "There they are all making for the river."

Just at this moment, the dogs, who could be seen in the distance, hurried en masse to the water side, in spite of all that their leader could do to prevent them. They almost disappeared behind the willows which bordered the river and one could hear them barking furiously; their barks sounded like rage mingled with terror.

"It is some duck that they have scented," observed the prosecutor.

"They wouldn't bark like this," said Monsieur de Camier with the sagacity of a professional hunter; "if it were a wolf, they could not make a greater uproar. Is it by chance some wild boar who is taking a bath in order to receive us more ceremoniously?"

He gave the horses a vigorous blow from the whip and they all rapidly approached the place where a scene was taking place which excited to the highest pitch everybody's curiosity. Before they reached the spot, the keeper, who had run after the dogs to call them together, came out of a thicket waving his hat to stop the hunters exclaiming in a screaming voice:

"A body! a body!"

"A full grown stag!" repeated Monsieur de Camier with sudden enthusiasm. He arose and at the risk of falling out of the cart, waved his whip shouting:

"A full grown stag in the water! hurrah! hurrah!"

The horses urged by the blows which fell upon their backs, started off on a gallop. The cavaliers followed their example, and in a few moments they were all on the spot where the huntsman was still continuing his shouts and gestures.

"A body! a drowned man!" exclaimed he when the vehicle stopped.

This time it was the public prosecutor who arose and jumped from the cart with the agility of a deer

"A drowned man!" said he. "In the name of the law, let nobody touch the body. Call back the dogs "

As he said these words, he hastened to the spot which the servant pointed out to him. Everybody dismounted and followed him. Octave and Bergenheim had exchanged strange glances when they heard the servant's words. The latter's agitation was so great that he nearly fell as he dismounted from his horse and it was some time before he could extricate his foot from the stirrup. At last, exercising a violent control over himself, he succeeded in calming his agitation and followed his companions with a calm, indifferent air.

An immense willow hung like a parasol over a sort of pool in a bend of the river, and one half of its flexible branches touched the ground while the other half dipped into the water. The dogs had surrounded the place and were barking furiously, some of them even darted into the river as if to try another method of attack; but, as soon as one of them dared to advance under the branches of the willow, he immediately beat a retreat showing signs of the greatest terror. Blows from the keeper's whip finally succeeded in keeping them at a distance. The hunters could then approach and see the object which excited to such a degree the terror of the whole pack. It was, as the servant had announced, the body of a man, thrown by the current against the trunk of the tree, and there he remained with his head caught between two branches of the willow as if in a vice.

"It is the carpenter!" exclaimed Monsieur de Camier as he parted the foliage which had prevented the head from being seen until then, for he recognized the workman's livid swollen features. "It is that poor devil of a Lambernier, is it not, Bergenheim?"

"It is true!" stammered Christian, who in spite of his boldness could not help but turn away his eyes. "The carpenter!—drowned!—this is frightful!—I never should have recognized him—How disfigured he is!" exclaimed the others as they pressed forward to gaze at this horrible spectacle.

"This is a sad way to escape justice," observed the notary in a philosophical tone.

The baron seized this overture with avidity.

"He must have crossed the river to escape," said he, "and in his haste he made a misstep and fell."

The public prosecutor shook his head with an air of doubt.

"That is not probable," said he; "I know the place. If he tried to cross the river a little above or a little below the rock—it doesn't matter which—the current would have carried him into the little bay above the rock and not here. It is evident that he must have drowned himself or been drowned lower down. I say, been drowned, for you can see that he has a wound upon the left side of his forehead as if he had received a violent blow or his head had hit against a hard substance. Now, if he had been drowned accidentally while crossing the river he would not have been wounded in this manner."

This remark silenced the baron and while the others exhausted conjectures to explain the way in which this tragic event had taken place, he stood motionless, with his eyes fastened upon the river and avoiding to glance at the dead body. During this time, the public prosecutor had taken from his pocket some paper and a pen which he usually carried with him.

"Gentlemen," said he seating himself upon the trunk of a tree opposite the drowned man, "two of you will do me the favor to act as witnesses while I draw up my official report. If any of you have a statement to make in regard to this affair, I beg of him to remain here so that I may receive his deposition."

Nobody stirred, but Gerfaut threw such a penetrating glance at the baron that the latter turned away his eyes.

"Gentlemen," continued the magistrate, "I do not want any of you to renounce the sport on account of this untoward incident. There is nothing attractive

about this spectacle and I assure you that if my duty did not keep me here, I should be the first to withdraw. Baron, I beg of you to send me two men and a stretcher in order to have the body carried away; I will have it taken to one of your farms so as not to frighten the ladies."

"The prosecutor is right," said Christian, whom these words delivered from a terrible anxiety; out of prudence, he dared not propose that they should resume their route, while the suffering which he experienced in the presence of the body of the man he had killed, grew more and more intolerable. "Let us proceed, gentlemen; this spectacle is really horrible; the wild boars will distract our minds from it."

The hunters did not make him repeat the invitation; with the exception of two who put themselves at the magistrate's disposal, they all returned to the cart and their horses. Soon the party were on their way to the Mares wood, but, during the remainder of the journey, conversation languished. When they reached the rendez-vous where the *traqueurs* were waiting for them, the report of the headman, who had been going through the woods, changed the course of their thoughts.

After a deliberation presided over by Monsieur de Camier, the *traqueurs* and the dogs left in silence to surround the thickets where the animal had been found to be hidden. At the same time, the hunters turned their steps in the opposite direction in order to take their positions. They soon reached the ditch alongside of which they were to place themselves. From time to time, as they advanced, one of them left the party and remained mute and motionless like a senti-

nel at his post. This manoeuvre constantly reduced their numbers and at last there were only three of them remaining.

"You stop here, Camier," said the baron, when they were about sixty steps from the last position.

The gentleman who knew the ground was hardly flattered by this proposition.

"By Jove," said he, "you are on your own grounds; you ought at least to do the honors of your woods and let us choose our own positions. I guess you wish to place yourself upon the outskirts because it is always about that region that the animal first appears; but there will be two of us, for I shall go also."

This determination annoyed Christian considerably, since it threatened to ruin the plan so prudently laid out.

"I am going to put our friend Gerfaut at this post," said he, whispering to the refractory hunter; "I shall be very much pleased if he has an opportunity to fire. What difference does one boar more or less make to an old hunter like you?"

"Well and good; just as you like," retorted Monsieur de Camier striking the ground with the butt-end of his gun and beginning to whistle in order to cool off his anger.

When the adversaries found themselves side by side and alone, Bergenheim's countenance changed suddenly; the smiling look he had assumed, in order to convince the old hunter of his cheerful dispositions, gave place to deep gravity.

"You remember our agreement," said he, as they walked along; "I feel sure that the boar will come in our direction. At the moment when I call out:

‘Take care!’ I shall expect you to fire; if, at the end of twenty seconds, you have not done so, I warn you that I shall fire myself.”

“Very well, monsieur,” said Gerfaut looking at him fixedly; “you also doubtless remember my words; the discovery of this body will give them still more weight. The public prosecutor has already commenced his preliminary proceedings; remember that it depends on me how they shall be completed. The deposition which I spoke to you about is in the hands of a safe person who is fully instructed to make use of it if necessary.”

“Marillac, I suppose,” said Christian in an evil tone; “he is your confidant. It is a fatal secret that you have confided to him, monsieur. If I survive to-day I shall have to secure his silence. May all this blood, past, present and future, be on your head!”

Deeply affected by this reproach, the vicomte bowed his head in silence.

“Here is my place,” said the baron stopping before the trunk of an old oak, “and there is the elm where you are to station yourself.”

Gerfaut stopped and said in a trembling voice:

“Monsieur, one of us will not leave these woods alive. In the presence of death, one tells the truth. I hope for your peace of mind and my own that you will believe my last words. I swear to you, upon my honor and by all that is sacred, that Madame de Bergenheim is innocent.”

He bowed and withdrew from Christian without waiting for a response.

A moment later, he stood motionless in front of the elm which had been pointed out to him. All the hunters

were at their posts. For several moments, the deepest silence reigned. There is always a great, although subdued excitement, during the minutes which precede the actual beginning of a boar hunt; all eyes anxiously search the thickets, all ears listen with strict attention; there is not a heart but what experiences a thrill at the first barking of the dogs; the calmest of men will seize his gun with a nervous hand, the most apathetic will pray that it may fall to him to kill this wild beast who sometimes disembowels the unfortunate one. This time, the commencement of the hunt produced its usual effect. An electric thrill ran through the hunters as the dogs commenced to bark in the distance. Each one threw a glance at his neighbor to warn him to be vigilant and cocked his gun to be ready to take aim at once.

Bergenheim and Gerfaut were out of sight of the others and stood at their posts with eyes fastened upon each other. The ditch was wide enough to prevent the branches of the trees from troubling them, at the distance of sixty feet, which separated them, each could see his adversary standing motionless and framed in by the green foliage. Suddenly, barking was heard in the distance partially drowned by the firing of a gun. A few seconds later, two feeble reports were heard followed by an imprecation from Monsieur de Camier whose caps flashed in the pan. The baron, who had just leaned forward that he might see better through the thickets, raised his hand to warn Octave to hold himself in readiness. He then placed himself in position. An extreme indecision marked Gerfaut's attitude. After having raised his gun, he dropped it to the ground with a despondent gesture as if his res-





olution to fire had suddenly abandoned him; the palor of death could not be more terrible than that which overspread his features.. The howling of the dogs and shouts of the hunters increased constantly. Suddenly another sound was heard. Low deep growls, followed by the crackling of branches, came from the woods opposite our adversaries. The whole thicket seemed to tremble as if agitated by a storm.

"Take care!" exclaimed Bergenheim in a firm voice.

At the same moment, an enormous head appeared and the report of a gun was heard. When Gerfaut looked through the smoke caused by his gun at the farther end of the ditch there was nothing to be seen but the foliage.

The boar, after crossing the clearing, vanished like a flash leaving behind him a trail of broken branches—and Bergenheim lying behind the trunk of the old oak upon which large drops of blood had already fallen.

CHAPTER XXVI

On the same morning, the drawing room of the Bergenheim castle, was the theatre of a quiet home scene very much like the one we described at the commencement of this story. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was seated in her arm-chair reading the periodicals which had just arrived; Aline was practicing upon the piano and her sister-in-law was seated before one of the windows, embroidering. By the calm attitude of these three ladies and the interest they seemed to show in their several occupations one would have supposed that they were all equally peaceful at heart. Madame de Bergenheim upon rising had resumed her usual habits; she managed to find the proper words to reply when spoken to, her dejection did not differ from her usual melancholy enough for it to become the subject of remark. A rather bright color in her cheeks heightened her beauty; her eyes had never sparkled with more brilliancy; but if a hand had been placed upon her forehead one would have soon discovered by its burning the secret of all this unwonted color. In fact, in the midst of this sumptuous room, surrounded by her friends and bending over her embroidery with most exquisite grace, Madame de Bregenheim was slowly dying. A wasting fever was circulating like poison through her veins. She felt that an unheard-of sorrow was hanging over her head, and that no effort of hers could prevent it.

At this very moment, either the man she belonged to or the one she loved was going to die; whatever her widowhood might be, she felt that her mourning would be of short duration; young, beautiful, surrounded by all the privileges of rank and fortune, life was closing around her and left but one pathway open which was full of blood; she would have to bath her feet in it in order to pass through.

For some time, the three women had kept silent; the sounds from the piano were all that was to be heard in the room; soon this ceased also. Out of patience with a passage that she had rehearsed for the tenth time, Aline suddenly arose and approached the window where her sister-in-law was seated. For several days, the two ladies had hardly spoken to each other. The young girl was troubled by this restraint and wished a reconciliation; but as Clemence did not seem disposed to make any advances, she tried to seek a common-place subject for conversation. While she was leaning against the window, her eyes wandered listlessly over the woody hills which extended alongside the opposite bank of the river; she found at last the subject for talk which she was seeking for.

"What is that smoke above the Montigny rock," exclaimed she with surprise; "it looks as if there was a fire in the woods."

Madame de Bergenheim raised her eyes, shivered from head to foot as she saw the stream of smoke which stood out against the horizon, and then let her head droop upon her breast. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil stopped her reading as she heard Aline's remark and turned slowly to look out of the window.

"That's some of the shepherds' work," said she;

"they have built a fire in the bushes at the risk of setting fire to the whole woods. Really, I do not know what to think of your husband, Clemence; he takes everybody away to the hunt with him and does not leave a soul here to prevent his dwelling from being devastated."

Clemence made no reply and her sister-in-law who expected she would say something to keep the conversation alive, returned and seated herself at the piano with a pouting air.

"Thanks, that will do for to-day!" exclaimed the old maid at the first notes; "you have split our heads long enough. You would do better to study your history of France."

Aline angrily closed the piano; but instead of obeying this last piece of advice, she remained seated upon the stool with the sulky air of a pupil in disgrace. There reigned a deep silence. Madame de Bergenheim had dropped her embroidery without noticing it. From time to time, she trembled as if a chill passed over her, her eyes were raised to watch the smoke ascending above the rock or else she seemed to listen for some imaginary sound.

"Truly," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, as she laid her journal down in her lap, "good morals have made great progress since the July revolution. Yesterday, a woman twenty years of age ran away to Montpellier with her lover; to-day, here is another, in Lyons, who poisons her husband and kills herself afterward. If I were superstitious I should say that the world was coming to an end. What do you think of such atrocious doings, my dear?"

Clemence raised her head with an effort and answered in a gloomy voice:

"You must pardon her since she is dead."

"You are very indulgent," replied the old aunt; "such creatures ought to be burned alive like the Brinvilliers."

"They often speak in the papers of husbands who kill their wives, but not so often of wives killing their husbands," said Aline with the partisan feeling natural to the fair sex.

"It is not proper that you should talk of such horrid things," replied the old maid in a severe tone; "behold the fruits of the morals of the age! It is the effect of all the disgusting stuff that is acted nowadays upon the stage and written up in novels. When one thinks of the fine education that is given youth at the present time, it is enough to make one tremble for the future!"

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle, you may be sure that I shall never kill my husband," replied the young girl to whom this remark seemed particularly addressed.

A stifled groan, which Madame de Bergenheim could not suppress, attracted the attention of the two ladies.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, noticing for the first time her niece's dejected air and the frightened expression in her eyes.

"Nothing—"murmured the latter; "I think it is the heat of the room."

Aline hastily opened a window and came and took her sister-in-law's hands in her own.

"You have a fever," said she; "your hands burn and your forehead also; I did not dare tell you, but your beautiful color—"

A frightful cry which Madame de Bergenheim uttered made the young girl draw back in fright.

"Clemence! Clemence!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who thought that her niece had gone insane.

"Did you not hear?" cried she with an accent of terror impossible to describe. She darted suddenly toward the drawing room door; but, instead of opening it, she leaned against it with arms crossed. Then she ran two or three times around the room in a sort of frenzy and ended by falling upon her knees before the sofa and burying her head in its cushions.

This scene bewildered the two women. While Mademoiselle de Corandeuil tried to raise Clemence, Aline, still more frightened, ran out of the room to call for aid. A rumor which had just commenced to arise in the court yard was distinctly heard when the door was thrown open. A moment more, and a piercing shriek was heard and the young girl rushed into the parlor; throwing herself on her knees beside her sister-in-law she pressed her to her breast with convulsive energy.

As she felt herself seized in this fashion, Clemence raised her head and placing her hands upon Aline's shoulders she pushed her backwards and gazed at her with eyes that seemed to devour her.

"Which? which?" asked she in a brusque voice.

"My brother—covered with blood!" stammered Aline.

Madame de Bergenheim pushed her aside and threw herself upon the sofa. Her first feeling was a horrible joy at not hearing the name of Octave; but she tried to smother her hysterical utterances by pressing her mouth against the cushion upon which her face was leaning.

A noise of voices was heard in the vestibule; the greatest confusion seemed to reign among the people outside. At last, several men entered the drawing room, at their head Monsieur de Camier whose ruddy face had lost all its color.

"Do not be frightened, ladies," said he, in a trembling voice; "do not be frightened. It is only a slight accident without any danger. Monsieur de Bergenheim was wounded in the hunt," continued he addressing Mademoiselle de Corandeuil; "I do not know where to have him carried."

Before the old maid could make any reply, the noise redoubled in the ante-chamber; a moment later, two men carrying a sort of litter appeared at the drawing room door.

"Not here! not here!" exclaimed Monsieur de Camier hurrying toward them to prevent them from entering.

There was a moment's hesitation outside. Several voices were speaking at once as if they were consulting to know what they had better do. At last, in spite of the injunction received, the folding doors were thrown open and two servants appeared bearing the baron upon a mattress.

He appeared to have fainted, if he was not entirely dead; his eyes were closed, his face pale; the expression of his features was hard and pitiless. They had taken off his coat and, here and there, large drops of blood stained his shirt and trousers. A large red patch was visible on the right side of his chest which they had bound up with handkerchiefs torn into bandages; under this place, the mattress was soaked with blood.

When the servants had deposited their burden in front of one of the windows, Aline threw herself upon

her brother's body uttering heart-rending cries. Madame de Bergenheim did not stir; she lay upon the sofa with eyes and ears buried in the cushions, and seemed deaf and blind to all that surrounded her. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was the only one who preserved her presence of mind. Controlling her emotion, she leaned over the baron and sought for some sign of life.

"Is he dead?" asked she in a low voice of Monsieur de Camier.

"No, mademoiselle," replied the latter in a tone which announced that he had little hope.

"Has a physician been sent for?"

"To Remiremont, Epinal, everywhere."

At this moment, Aline uttered a cry of joy. Bergenheim had just stirred, brought to life, perhaps, by the pressure of his sister's arms. He opened his eyes and closed them several times; at last, his energy triumphed over his sufferings; he sat up on his improvised cot and, leaning upon his left elbow, he glanced around the room.

"My wife!" said he in a weak voice.

Madame de Bergenheim arose and forced her way through the group which surrounded the mattress and silently took her place beside her husband. Her features had changed so terribly within a few moments that a murmur of pity ran through the group of men that filled the room.

"Take my sister away," said Christian, disengaging his hand from the young girl who was covering it with kisses and tears.

"My brother! I cannot leave my brother!" exclaimed the young girl as she was dragged away rather than led to her room.

"Leave me for a moment," continued the baron; "I wish to speak to my wife."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil gave Monsieur de Camier a questioning glance as if to ask if it were best to grant this request.

"We can do nothing before the doctors arrive, said the latter in a low voice, "and perhaps it would be imprudent to oppose him."

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil recognized the correctness of this observation, and left the room asking the others to follow her. During this time, Madame de Bergenheim remained motionless in her place apparently insensible to all that surrounded her. The noise of the closing door aroused her from her stupor. She looked around the room as if she were seeking the others; her eyes which were opened with the fixed look of a somnambulist did not change their expression when they fell upon her husband.

"Come nearer," said he, "I have not strength enough to speak loud."

She obeyed mechanically. When she saw the large red satin which had soaked Christian's right sleeve, she closed her eyes, threw back her head and her features contracted with a horrified expression.

"You women are wonderfully fastidious," said the baron as he noticed this movement; "you delight in causing a murder, but the slightest scratch frightens you. Pass over to the left side, you will not see so much blood—besides, it is the side where the heart is."

There was something terrible in the irony of the voice in which he spoke at this moment. Clemence fell upon her knees beside him and took his hand crying:

"Pardon! pardon!"

The dying man took away his hand, raised his wife's head and looking at her a few moments attentively, he said at last:

"Your eyes are very dry. No tears! What! not one tear when you see me thus!"

"I cannot weep," replied she; "I shall die!"

"It is very humiliating for me to be so poorly regretted, and it does you little honor—Try to shed a few tears, madame—It will be remarked—A widow who does not weep!"

"A widow—never!" said she with energy.

"It would be convenient if they sold tears as they do crape, would it not? Ah! ah! only, you women have a real talent for that—all women know how to weep."

"You will not die, Christian—Oh! tell me that you will not die and that you will forgive me."

"Your lover has killed me," said Bergenheim slowly; "I have a bullet in my chest—I feel it—I am the one who is to die—In less than an hour I shall be a corpse—Don't you see how hard it is already for me to talk?"

In reality, his voice was becoming weaker and weaker. His breath grew shorter with each word; a wheezing sound within the chest indicated the extent of the lesion and the continued extravasation of blood.

"Mercy! pardon!" exclaimed the unhappy woman prostrating herself upon the floor.

"More air—open the windows—" said the baron as he fell back upon the mattress exhausted by the efforts he had just made to talk.

Madame de Bergenheim obeyed his order with the

precision of an automaton. A fresh pure breeze entered the room; when the curtains were raised, floods of light inundated the floor, and the old portraits, suddenly lighted up, looked like ghosts who had left their graves to witness the death agonies of the last of their descendants. Christian, refreshed by the air which swept over his face, sat up again. He gazed with a melancholy eye at the radiant sun and the green woods which lay stretched out in front of the chateau.

"I lost my father on such a day as this," said he, as if talking to himself—"All our family die during the beautiful weather—Ah! do you see that smoke over the Montigny rock?" exclaimed he suddenly.

After opening the windows, Clemence stepped out upon the balcony. Leaning upon the balustrade, she gazed at the deep rapid river which flowed at her feet. Her husband's voice calling her aroused her from this gloomy contemplation. When she returned to Christian, his eyes were flaming, a flush like that of fever had overspread his cheeks and a writhing, furious indignation was depicted upon his face. "Were you looking at that smoke?" said he angrily; "it is your lover's signal; he is there—he is waiting to take you away—And I, your husband, forbid you from going—You must not leave me—your place is here—close by me."

"Close by you," repeated she not understanding what he said.

"Wait at least until I am dead," continued he, while his eyes flashed more and more—"let my body get cold—When you are a widow you can do as you like—you will be free—and even then—I forbid it—I

order you to wear mourning for me—above all try to weep—”

“Strike me with a knife. At least I should bleed,” said she bending toward him and tearing open her dress to lay bare her bosom.

He grabbed her by the arm and exerting all his wasting strength to reach her, he said, in a voice whose harshness was changed almost into supplication:

“Clemence, do not dishonor me by giving yourself to him when I am dead—I would curse you if I thought that you would do that—”

“Oh! do not curse me,” exclaimed she; “do not drive me mad. Do you not know that I am going to die?”

“There are women who do not see their husband’s blood upon their lover’s hands—but I would curse you—”

He dropped Clemence’s arm and fell back upon the mattress with a sob. His eyes closed and some unintelligible words died on his lips, which were covered with a bloody froth. He was dying—.

Madame de Bergenheim, crouched down upon the floor, heard him repeating in his expiring voice:

“I would curse you—I would curse you.”

She remained motionless for some time, her eyes fastened upon the dying man before her with a look of stupefied curiosity. Then she arose and went to the mirror; she gazed at herself for a moment as if obeying the whim of an insane woman, pushing aside, in order to see herself better, the hair which covered her forehead. Suddenly a flash of reason came to her; she uttered a horrible cry as she saw some blood upon her face; she looked at herself from head to foot; her

dress was stained with it; she wrung her hands in horror and felt that they were wet. Her husband's blood was everywhere. Then, her brain filled with the fire of raving madness, she rushed out upon the balcony, and Bergenheim, before his last breath escaped him, heard the noise of her body as it fell into the river.

* * * * *

Several days later, the "Sentinelles des Vosges" contained the following paragraph written with the official sorrow found in all death notices at thirty sous per line:

"A frightful event which has just thrown two of our best families into mourning, has caused the greatest consternation throughout the Remiremont district. Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim, one of the richest land owners in our province, was killed by accident at a wild boar hunt on his own domains. It was by the hand of one of his best friends, Monsieur de Gerfaud, well known by his important literary work which has given its author a world-wide reputation, that he received his death blow. Nothing could equal the grief of the involuntary cause of this catastrophe. Madame de Bergenheim, upon learning of this tragic accident, was unable to survive the death of her adored husband and drowned herself in her despair. Thus the same grave received this couple, yet in the bloom of life, and to whom their great mutual affection seemed to promise a most happy future."

Twenty-eight months later, the Parisian journals, in

their turn, inserted, with but slight variations, the following article:

"Nothing could give any idea of the enthusiasm manifested at the Theatre-Francais last evening, at the first representation of Monsieur de Gerfaut's new drama. Never has this writer, whose silence literature has deplored for too long a time, distinguished himself so highly before. His early departure for the East is announced. Let us hope that this voyage will turn to the advantage of art, and that the beautiful and sunny countries of Asia will be a mine for new inspirations for this celebrated poet who has taken, in such a glorious manner, his place at the head of our literature—"

Berghenheim's last wish had been realized; his honor was secure; nobody outraged by even an incredulous smile the purity of Clemence's winding sheet; and the world did not refuse to their double grave the common-place consideration that had surrounded their lives.

Clemence's death did not destroy the future of the man who loved her so passionately, but the mourning he wears for her, to this day, is of the kind that is never put aside. And as the poet's heart was always reflected in his works, the world took part in this mourning without being initiated into its mystery. When the bitter cup of memory overflowed in them, they believed it to be a new vein which had opened in the writer's brain. Octave received, every day, congratulations upon this sadly exquisite tone of his lyre whose vibrations surpassed in supreme intensity the sighs of René or Obermann's Reveries. Nobody knew

those sad pages were written under the inspiration of the most mournful of visions, and that this dark and melancholy tinge which was taken for a caprice of the imagination had its source in blood and in the spasms of a broken heart.

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